

nates, "Don't let that lady get down!" Whereat they with one heart and voice reply, "Non, monsieur!" and recommence the duet, "Ne descendez pas, madame!"

To feel one's self the object of such deep solicitude ought to be flattering to

the traveller, while to the company its vigilance is profitable, for if, in spite of prayers and prohibitions, you should contrive to get under the train, you may be sure that you have received all the damages you are likely to have.

G. H. P.

AN AMERICAN SALON IN ROME.

WE can scarcely, on this side of the Atlantic, form a clear idea of what the Europeans mean by a *salon*. We have not yet reached that repose which centuries of culture have brought to our cousins abroad. Our intellectual recreations are still confined to literary clubs, and we have not yet acquired the art of sporting with learning.

Some French *gourmet* once accused the Americans of having fifty or more religious creeds, and but one sauce. We might in the same sense say, We have hundreds of social gatherings where intelligence, wit, and beauty are no rare things, but we have no *salons*.

A *salon* invariably implies intellectual recreation. It is an unpretending gathering of clever men and women, brought together by some leading *maîtresse de maison*, for the purpose of promoting an agreeable exchange of thoughts and sentiments. This sort of intellectual conviviality is mostly found in France, French being of all languages the best adapted for conversation, and the French people the most emotional of nations. But wherever a certain number of cultivated people can be brought together the same object may be attained. We Americans have, however, scarcely a conception of this kind of entertainment. Conversation with us is a means to an end; in France it is made a flowery path leading nowhere,—a ball thrown from one to the other, and caught

up with more or less dexterity. No chance there for instructive monologuing, Coleridge fashion. The Frenchman is impatient, and looks upon every lengthy discourser as an intruder encroaching upon his rights. Hence the rapidity with which the French pass from one subject to another. Nor need this mode of exchanging ideas necessarily be called flip-pant. Any one acquainted with the better society in France will admit that it is in most instances the result of great flexibility of mind, in no wise excluding terseness of thought. *Salon* life affords the French an arena for such excellent brain-gymnastics that they must of necessity, with their natural brightness, become masters in the art of talking.

Professional men of letters and artists have what they call their *quarts-d'heure d'artistes*,—happy moments where a privileged few come together to give their ideas an airing, and where mind meets mind with all the *abandon* and freedom the Sacred Nine allow their votaries. But the *salon* is not so exclusive, and is open to all sorts of combatants.

The origin of the *salon par excellence* may be traced to the far-famed Hôtel de Rambouillet, which flourished in the middle of the seventeenth century. From all we know of it, it must have been painfully pedantic, and reminds us somewhat of a few literary societies of the present day, pivoting on grammars and dictionaries, and whose erudition, instead

of being an ornament, becomes a burden,—a veritable galley-slave's cannon-ball fastened to the foot and impeding all progress. Yet did these reunions inaugurate a new order of things, inasmuch as they introduced conversation in polite society. Up to that time the intelligent world knew nothing better than disputing, haranguing; the Rambouillet circle discovered the art of talking,—talk very stilted, it is true, for, among other reformatory measures, the Hôtel pretended to correct bad taste in literature, and, by straining the point too much, fell into affectation: still, purist as it was, it exercised a healthful influence both in letters and in society. Presided over by that rare trio of gifted women, Catherine de Vivonne, Julie Savelli, and Julie d'Angennes,—of whom we have such interesting records,—it formed a new power, that of the intellect, namely, in opposition to the frivolity of the courts of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV.

Since those Rambouillet gatherings, society in France presents a long list of *salons* of the first order, and it is a study of no small interest to examine into their workings and see how they were in fact the platforms whereon literature, the fine arts, statesmanship even, made their claims best known and found in the superior women of the time their best exponents. Woman has from time immemorial been the energizing influence that led the world onward. Whether as Judith or Joan of Arc, a Sophie Gay or a Récamier,—heroines stepping out of their circumscribed spheres, or *maitresses de maison*,—they have ever made good the poet's assertion that it is through the *ewigweibliche* that humanity advances. The question is where this *ewigweibliche* is most effectual: on the Woman's Rights platform, or in the domestic and social circle?

A superior woman is not necessarily a highly-educated woman, or one of great intellectual powers.

Take for instance the celebrated Madame Geoffrin. Her best years were those when she was at the turning-point of life. She appears to us as if she had always been old; and yet what extraor-

dinary charm must have been hers to have attached to her men of such diverse tastes and capacities? Horace Walpole, describing her in a letter to Lady Hervey, says, "She is a person of excellent sense, of good advice, of ready wit, and extremely well informed. She has, moreover, a way of reproving one that is perfectly charming. I never knew before how pleasant it was to be scolded. She seizes upon the defects and vanities and pretensions of people with an accuracy of judgment and clearness of demonstration that convinces at once of the correctness of her views. The next time I see her, I shall say to her, 'Oh, thou dear Common Sense! sit down here by my side, and teach me how to think.'"

Madame Geoffrin belonged to the French middle class, and was the wife of a well-to-do business-man. Her *salon*, the most complete of the eighteenth century, was for twenty-five years the resort of the most distinguished men of her time,—philosophers, men of letters, artists, princes, ambassadors, and noted foreigners from all parts of Europe. Yet what was the bringing up of that gifted woman? The Empress Catherine of Russia questioning her on this point, she replied in a letter the simple wisdom of which might indeed be considered a summary of all that Montaigne has said about education:

"I lost," she says, "my father and mother when I was yet in the cradle. It was my old grandmother that brought me up; and she had an excellent head, that old grandmother. She had very little of what you would call education; but her mind was so clear, so active, so *handy* (if one may apply such a term to mind), that it always stepped in in time where knowledge was at fault. She spoke so agreeably of things she knew nothing about, that no one wished her better informed. When her ignorance became too obvious, she would help herself out with a joke. Pedants never got a chance to humiliate her. Speaking of me to others, she would say, 'If my grand-daughter is a dunce, knowledge will only give her confidence in herself and make her a bore; if she has natu-

rally a good mind and sensibility, she will do as I have done,—supply by tact and sentiment what she may lack in erudition.’ Thus was I never taught anything in my childhood except reading; and I read a vast deal. By reasoning I learned to think; I learned to know men by being asked what I thought of them. My good grandmother exchanged opinions with me as if I was a grown woman, and, whenever I was wrong, corrected me with such gentleness and so much grace that I never concealed from her anything I thought or felt: my education was thus continuous.”

We do not mean by this to preach ignorance as a means of elegant culture, but only to show that there is more than one way of being a superior woman, and that our foremothers, for knowing less Latin and mathematics than we do, were not therefore destitute of intelligence, and that they understood, moreover, how to collect the gold of learning at a less sacrifice of heart and health than we do. All that we can gather from those celebrated leaders of society of the past century goes to show that they were emotional natures, full of tenderness and sympathy, whose culture was the natural result of intelligent observation. They knew nothing of bookmongery and the cramming of useful knowledge.

The mistake in our present systems of education, especially on this side of the Atlantic, is the importance attached to mere information. Information is not cultivation, and stuffing the brain with all and everything knowable is not imparting life to it. In most cases it results in nothing more than mere conceit of knowledge, instead of sound learning: we appear to know. Mrs. Malaprop was not so far out of the way when she spoke of Captain Absolute’s physiognomy as being “grammatical.” The absurdity has an almost prophetic sense. We have wellnigh succeeded in making ourselves *grammatical* physiognomies. Naturalness, freshness of feeling, spontaneity of expression, lie so deep buried under the accumulated pedantry of the age and its hardening conventionality that nothing short of a complete revolution in our

modes of teaching will ever be able to resuscitate them.

“*Autre temps, autres mœurs*,” say the French; and yet, comparing epochs, manners, and customs, the more thoughtful can scarcely help regretting the good old time when learning went hand in hand with sensibility and reverence and made itself agreeable by dint of amiability. It was, therefore, not without deep-felt pleasure that we found in Miss Brewster’s drawing-room in Rome a specimen of that genuine *salon* spirit which gave such charm to the social gatherings of former days.

Miss Anne Hampton Brewster, the author of those spirited and well-digested articles which we so heartily welcome in the *Evening Telegraph* and the *Parisian*, is one of those full-souled women whose very presence makes sunshine in a circle. *Petite* and *rondelette*, with one of those physiognomies that have no age,—vitality of mind being to them a veritable *fontaine de jeunesse*,—she gives at once the impression of a thoroughly amiable person. She is not a *grande dame*, to stand in awe of, nor is she what is generally meant by a *bel esprit*, which in many instances might be translated *cruel by dint of wit*, for she holds her wit under lock and key, as it were, and in the keeping of her heart; least of all is she an *esprit fort*, for she is a true member of the Roman Catholic Church: her forte lies in a discriminative charity and a genuine and sympathetic kindness toward all men.

Miss Brewster occupies a portion of the upper stories of the Palazzo Maldura, Via Quattro Fontane. Her apartments form a suite of rooms, cosy and homelike, which she throws open every Wednesday evening to her friends for social intercourse. *Littérateurs* of all nationalities, painters, sculptors, distinguished foreigners, professional men and amateurs, meet there on that evening in the most informal manner. The wraps are left in charge of the maid in attendance in the hall, and one enters the drawing-room *sans gêne* and with a sort of home feeling, so familiar and unpretending are all the appointments. One is always sure

there of three good things,—a friendly welcome, a refreshing cup of tea, and good society. People who in their every-day walk constantly meet objects which for sublimity of conception and excellence of execution are unrivalled on earth receive through their senses a training which erudition alone cannot give. Those grand lines of the Coliseum, of the arches of Titus and Constantine; those noble fountains and columns; those superb churches; all those inimitable forms left to us by ages the transcendental culture of which has provided the world with models for evermore, must fashion the soul of man toward such an appreciation of the beautiful and form his taste toward such excellence as must banish from his nature—provided it be an impressionable nature—all tendency to feebleness or triviality. It is from such minds that we get that higher entertainment we come to seek,—good talk; talk that flows strong naturally and as from a fountain.

We will suppose one of Miss Brewster's Wednesday soirées, when all is in tune, weather and temperaments, and no hitch anywhere. The guests have sipped the inspirational cup of tea which is always handed round in the early part of the evening, and are dispersing by twos and threes in the drawing-room.

We approach one group. They are discussing the Ludovisi Juno. One that knows is commenting on the perfections of that divine head, and gives us, in the most off-hand of chit-chats, what we should consider in America a studied lecture on high art. From Juno's head they turn to the owner of the work.

"Who is this Ludovisi, and how came he by such a rare bit of antiquity?" asks some newly-arrived foreigner.

"Prince Ludovisi," replies the Juno commentator, "owns one of the finest art-galleries in Rome; but it is not by virtue of his princeliness that he owns it, but by virtue of his knowledge of art."

Then follows the history of the prince, which, to us Americans who know something of poor boys starting in business with pennies and becoming millionaires, assumes a double interest.

"Prince Ludovisi's grandfather was a poor boy, who one fine morning left his paternal walls, literally speaking (there being scarcely anything else left of the thing he called home), and with two *lire* in his pocket came to try his fortune in the city. And fortune proved favorable. From *saute-ruisseau* he became a banker's clerk; from clerk, banker; from banker, prince."

"How prince?"

"As Rothschild became a baron. He lent big sums to the needy government, and thus made himself deserving of the title."

"Bought it?"

"Yes, bought it, if you like, but wore it with better grace and more deservedly than many a dolt that comes to his by right of legitimate succession. His collection he brought together in the long run of years, by watching sale-opportunities and through fortunate excavations (he owns large tracts of land in the Campagna). The present prince inherited, with his father's fortune, the same love of art. He is a devotee, and so jealous of his treasures that only a privileged few are admitted to his gallery. The story goes that not even his own daughter is allowed admittance."

Some one makes here a remark about originality pushed to extremes, and how much more generous-minded the Americans are with their art-collections, or anything that can be of benefit to the public mind.

A pause follows, and certain black eyes make silent answer. Oh, those Italian eyes!—those deep, searching, knowing, penetrating looks! What terse replies they can make! Italy is Italy, say those eyes. It hates well; it loves well; it squanders its beads to the people; it holds its pearls fast; it can stab an enemy, but it will strip itself for a friend; it will never learn how to turn the goods of this world to the best account, but it will always have a favored seat in the Conclave of the Gods, and will ever be the darling of the Muses.

At the other end of the room we hear a very lively dissertation.

Some lady claims to have made at a

recent visit to the Lateran museum, in room X, an important discovery. She describes two antique statues—*termes*—the faces of which are in every feature the originals of Kaulbach's Mephistophiles.

"Yes," says Mrs. —, "Kaulbach turns out to be as bold a plagiarist as any, unless, indeed, those heathen rogues, the ancients, copied from him."

"Oh!" exclaims a timid young lady, in a tone of evident disappointment; "and I who always thought that the Mephistopheles of Kaulbach was such an inspiration! The very essence of Mephistophelism! Those wicked eyes! that fiendish sneer!"

"Well, mademoiselle, so it is. Give a thing but a name, and imagination does the rest. Those antique *termes* are simply deliciously sylvan, without any trace of Middle-Age Mephistophelism. They are very much alike, differing only in a small detail of ornamentation. Strip them of their pastoral adornments, and put on their heads the traditional Mephisto cap, with its fiery plume, change their innocent pedestals into the wiry limbs and legendary hoofs of the great enemy of mankind, and you shall have two *bona fide* Mephistos."

The subject starts an amusing discussion about plagiarism and plagiarists in general. We turn to another part of the room, and come upon a trio of ladies, —the hostess with two strangers. The question of lace has been brought up.

"Lace?" says Miss Brewster, who seems to be posted on all possible subjects. "Here, Harnish" (beckoning to a young man close by), "get me my box of laces."

Mr. Harnish is *l'ami de la maison*, a young American sculptor who has turned Roman. The box is brought and opened, and Miss Brewster unfolds its ethereal treasures,—laces of all descriptions: antique lace, Spanish, French, Italian. Their various excellences are dwelt upon, discussed, explained, with the grace and lightness of the fabric itself. Serious in all her views of life, Miss Brewster will treat the most frivolous topics with so genial a warmth as to lend them all

the weight they lack. "Superb! is it not?" she remarks, throwing a piece of lace over her black dress. "*Point d'Espagne*. Observe these raised flowers. How fine they would look on black velvet! Enough here for a flounce, don't you think? It is a souvenir from Signora V—. This, again, is fifteenth-century lace. Oh for those fifteenth-century eyes and fingers, so strong and clever! Look at these flowers and arabesques! how severely beautiful! Compare it with this modern Brussels," pointing to another piece; "beauty in the one, prettiness in the other. Yes" (with a dubious smile), "we are *passés maitres* in pretty things."

A young man approaches, who seems to have something on his mind, for he looks absently on the rare objects before us. "Could you tell me something about the university here, Miss Brewster?" he asks. "I am writing an article on the subject, and should like to get some reliable information about it."

"Yes, I can," is the prompt response. "I will give you a letter of introduction to —, and he will put you on the right track." The laces are replaced in the box, and Miss Brewster enters upon a discussion about university affairs.

Touch upon any matter, and it finds an echo. No subject too high, none too trivial: *bric-à-brac*, antiquities, excavations; where the finest engravings may be bought; who the best jewellers are; what picture-galleries deserve the main attention; whose studios are the most noteworthy.

And does one hear at these conversation-banquets no *sottises*, no impertinences? Is everybody clever, witty, amiable? asks the honest reader, a little tired, perhaps, of this prolonged praise of European doings.

Even in the most polished society we must expect the best talk to be often traversed by speeches of the Nick Bottom pattern; but as long as the brayer keeps within his native domain there is no end to the hostess's kindly forbearance. She has always on hand some gentle fairy ready to treat translated weavers to their accustomed provender, "*dry*

oats and sweet good hay." It is only presumption and conceit that rouse the *mordant* of her kindly disposition. As, for instance, some such product of hot-house education as once met her friendly salutation, "I am very glad to meet you, madame; I have heard a great deal about you; you are quite a linguist, I understand," with a supercilious, patronizing air, and the nonchalant reply, full of conscious superiority, "Thank you, yes; I know some few languages,—a dozen or so,—but I fear I have quite forgotten my Anglo-Saxon." Or some specimen of that flippant, empty-headed, empty-hearted crowd that goes abroad each year determined to see Europe too, *coûte que coûte*.

"You have visited England, Miss —?"

"Oh, yes; England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, and Italy."

"How did you like Edinburgh?"

"Edinburgh? Edinburgh? Did we see Edinburgh, mamma?"

Mamma is a very elegant lady, and proud of her daughter, and she answers, "Yes, my dear: don't you remember the Koenigsstuhl on the top of the hill?"

"Ah, yes, I remember: it was very pretty indeed."

What are you to do with such people? and does it matter much, after all, if they mix up Heidelberg with Edinburgh?

But such feeble offshoots of intelligent society are of rare occurrence in the drawing-room of the Palazzo Maldura. A circle whose leader unites to so great a degree all the qualities requisite for a *maitresse de maison* must of necessity be select. The law of attraction will always insure good company there.

Any one that has studied the machinery of society and what constitutes its civilizing forces must acknowledge the good influence well-organized *salons* have exercised, how they are calculated to call out dormant capabilities and bring, so to say, learning into the market, turning its hoarded-up gold into currency. What else but learned pleasure-grounds were those *Orti de' Rucellai*, where the best minds of Florence came to discuss Plato and recite poetry?—

flowery *conversazioni*, where brain met brain without distinction of persons, where historians, statesmen, poets, artists, sported with learning. The Medicis there confronted amicably their most republican antagonists, Lorenzo listening to Machiavelli without fear of conspiracies.

It is this sporting with learning which we have yet to learn before we can hope to have genuine *salons*. Our European cousins understand that: they carry their erudition about jauntily,—as a luxury. They get recreation out of the most serious subjects,—out of philosophy, theology even. Their arts and sciences, when they go into company, doff their doctors' hats and studio-aprons and put on drawing-room attire. We are apt to call this frivolity, superficiality; yet is it in fact nothing more than a lighter handling of serious things.

One of our greatest drawbacks is that spirit of analysis which we carry into everything. We spend our energies upon the parts, and fail to grasp the beauty of the whole. We aim too much at mathematical correctness, like that young painter who, wishing to paint a perfect horse, went about constructing it according to strict mathematical and anatomical rules. Nanni worked a long time, zealously, earnestly, honestly, anxiously, and when, after infinite trouble, the horse stood there, color, form, muscles, bones, veins, every horse-particle in its proper place, he found to his consternation that, although it was a superb horse, it was in fact but a lifeless truth: the thing was dead, dead. Steps in the abbé-friend and says wisely, "*Lascia la matematica, Nanni mio, e studia le donne.*"*

Our time is not balanced; it is too intensely realistic,—"nervous and rapacious," as Miss Brewster says in one of her later letters from Rome. "You notice," says she most justly, "this malady of nerves everywhere; not only in art and society, but in government and politics, in Bismarck and Gladstone, in Gambetta and Garibaldi."

* Let mathematics alone, my Nanni, and study woman.

The spirit of the times, in its clamor for progress, seems to have broken all bounds and to be running wild. The whole world is turned into a vast race-course, the fastest runner winning the prize,—a prize very often not worth the seeking: A sort of nervous energy has taken the place of the fervor and enthusiasm we used to throw into our pursuits.

One of the princes of the French bar, M. Georges Lachaud, in his admirable little book, "Voyage au Pays des Blagueurs," attributes this absence of fervor and enthusiasm in all things to the absence of woman,—of her better influence in society. "No Madame Roland," says he, "sits by the side of the statesman now when he prepares his speeches;" and he goes on to show that this is because men no longer love women as they used to love them; they no longer seek their company from habit and necessity, and are no longer really desirous to please them.

But why? and may this not be to a certain degree the fault of woman herself? May not men have stopped seeking her better influence because she has veiled herself and they no longer recognize her under the new disguise? In her maternal solicitude for the darkling earth, and her wish to rectify its blunders, she imprudently stepped down from her sanctuary and trailed her white robes in the dust and mire of society's most vexatious questions. Was not this jeopardizing her legitimate influence? How can she attend to state affairs and at the same time raise for the state the worthy sons and noble daughters it has a right to ask of her? This same question was also agitated by the ancients, and is not so new a thing as we are made to believe. Woman with them could, as now, step

out of the family circle without forfeiting the respect of her more domestic sisters. Aspasia and Leontium, who made Pericles and Epicurus the objects of their devotion, were highly-gifted women, whose *conversazioni* were no doubt excellent schools for culture for the youth of Athens. Modern morality classes them with the courtesans; ancient morality called them *hetæra*, from *ἑταῖρος*, comrade, fellow. They were men's mates in learning. Others, again, were priestesses,—initiates, like Diotima, the wife of Manteneus, whom Plato exalted in his "Banquet," and who is made to say such fine things through the mouth of Socrates. She was a doctor of the sacred science of love. But, as a general rule, the woman remained in the gynæceum, and that without detriment to any of the higher faculties of her mind. Her intellectual spinning and weaving was reserved exclusively for the benefit of her husband and family. Calpurnia, the wife of Pliny the Younger, was evidently a woman of high literary culture. She had so identified herself with her husband's works that she had become a second himself. She knew his works by heart, and had set his poetry to music, singing his verses on her lyre. It is said that she accompanied him when he lectured in public, and concealed herself behind the curtained tribune, where she listened, no doubt eagerly, to the public's applause.

Not till woman recognizes wherein her real power lies, and reassumes the household sceptre, may we look forward to a better state of things and the return of those virtues which made the family hearth the centre of everything. The *salon* is but an extension of this centre.

C. R. CORSON.

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