



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

HOUSEHOLD WORDS

NON-FICTION BY WILKIE COLLINS

(PART 2)

A SHY SCHEME

AWFUL WARNING TO BACHELORS

SEA-BREEZES WITH THE LONDON SMACK

THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

AUGUST 2006

Household Words II

More non-fiction by Wilkie Collins

Introduction

In April the Wilkie Collins Society published three non-fiction pieces written by Collins for Dickens's weekly periodical *Household Words*. This month we publish three more. None of these contributions has been printed since their first appearance in the 1850s.

By the time Collins wrote these items he was on the staff of *Household Words* earning five guineas (£5.25) a week and keeping the copyright of his work.

Collins non-fiction falls into three broad categories: Re-told historical tales; art and drama reviews; and social satire and comment. These three are all in the latter category. Although Collins did not pick any of them to be reprinted or collected among the forty essays in *My Miscellanies* the first two reprinted here were chosen by Dickens to lead the weekly issue of *Household Words* in which they appeared.

A Shy Scheme is a social satire on the manners and mores of courtship. In the persona of a shy man, who recounts his own embarrassing attempts at securing a wife, he calls on British Wives and British Daughters to write a handbook of courtship to tell shy men how to proceed.

A week later Collins is back in the character of a man who hates marriage and warns men against it. *An Awful Warning to Bachelors* analyses the insults to men which run through the whole etiquette of courtship and marriage.

The final story is rather different. Here he becomes more himself, though with a wife, and complains about a favourite sea-side town – probably Ramsgate – which has become in essence London on Sea with the same habits, food, music, social life and annoyances.

Note on the text

As before the text is taken from *Household Words* and retains the original spelling, punctuation, and arrangement. Ann Lohrli's wonderful book *Household Words...table of contents, list of contributors and their contributions* (Toronto 1973) is relied on here for attribution.

All Wilkie's non-fiction pieces in *Household Words* are now available in e-text form at www.wilkiecollins.com

Paul Lewis
August 2006

A SHY SCHEME.

I AM a shy young man, with a limited income. My residence is in the country—my hair is light—my cheeks are rosy—my stature is small—my manners are mild—my name is Koddle.

How it is that professed literary gentlemen contrive to slide as smoothly as they do, out of one topic and into another, without the slightest appearance of any accompanying jerk, is a mystery to me. I want to tack on to the information imparted in my first paragraph, two additional facts: first, that I am anxious to be settled in life; secondly, that I have my eye on a young woman. But there seems, somehow, to be a disrespectful abruptness in mentioning the object of my attachment in that way. It is as if I dragged her into this page by the neck and shoulders, instead of appearing serenely before the public gaze, with my charmer escorted on my arm. Her residence is in the country—her hair is light—her cheeks are rosy—her stature is small—her manners are mild. Except that she has no income at all, and that her name is not Koddle, my young woman is wonderfully like me in everything, extreme shyness included. Under these circumstances, it is perhaps remarkable that I should be so fond of her as I am. I can't account for that. But I can smooth away another little difficulty; I can explain how it is that I have not yet imparted the state of my affections. I don't know how.

“Please, Miss, will you marry me?” Too abrupt. “My other self! plunge your hand into my bosom, extract the throbbing principle within, observe whether it adores you or not, and if appearances are satisfactory, keep it for ever.” Pretty, but, perhaps, at the same time incomprehensible to a practical young woman of the present day. Ogling? Will ogling alone do it? Possibly; but I have not the right kind of eyes for that exercise. My organs of ogling are too light in colour, too small in size, and too stiff in their action for the purpose. Perpetual sighing? She might mistake my intentions, and fancy that I was only endeavouring to express to her a wretched state of health. A sudden dart at her in her father's presence, and an affectionate clasping of her round the waist, under her father's astonished eyes? Could that excellent gentleman be depended on to start from his chair, and say, “Scoundrel, what are your intentions?”—and could I make sure of having presence of mind enough to drop on my knees and reply instantly, “Dear sir, they are strictly honourable”? I fear not; it takes so much to get some parents out of

their chairs, and so little to upset a lover, like me. Shall I write to her father? Then there is the dreadful embarrassment of the first meeting with her afterwards. Shall I write to the charmer herself? The same embarrassment still lies in wait for me. I can't express it in words, or looks, or sighs, or sudden embraces, or epistolary correspondence. What am I to do? Again the humiliating confession escapes me; again I answer—I don't know.

This is a serious, and, as I am inclined to think, even a sad state of things. Here is my future depending on my doing some thing—and I can't do it. Even if I could find the courage to make the offer, I should not feel certain of discovering, at the same time, the right words in which to express it. In this matter such awful interests depend upon such shocking trifles. I know a heart-rending case in point. A friend of mine, almost as shy as I am myself, armed himself with the resolution which I do not possess, watched his opportunity, and started with his offer of marriage to the object of his affection. It was in the winter time, and he had a cold. He advanced about six words into the preparatory sentence; the lady was listening with modest, yet encouraging, attention—he got to the seventh word, and felt a sudden titillation in the upper part of his nose—he pronounced the eighth word, and burst irrepressibly into a shrill, raging, screaming Sneeze! The lady (who can blame her?) after a noble effort to preserve her self-control, fell back in the chair in convulsions of laughter. An offer is an essentially serious thing; who could proceed with it under those circumstances? Not my friend, at any rate. He tried to begin again, two or three days afterwards. At his first look of unutterable love, at his first approach to the tender topic, he saw the lady's face get red, and the lady's lips desperately compress themselves. The horrid explosion of the sneeze was firing itself off again in her memory—she was shaking all over with suppressed laughter. He tried a third time; the same result followed: and then he gave it up. They have not met since; they never will meet. They were made for each other by nature; they were sweetly and suitably matched in age, fortune, social position, and mutual tastes. And what has rudely torn them asunder for ever?—a Sneeze! I write this with the tears in my eyes, and do not envy the feelings of any man or woman who can laugh at it.

To return to my own case. It is very hard, I think, that no provision is made for bashful men like me, who want to declare the state of their affections, who are not accustomed to female society, and who are habitually startled and confused, even on ordinary occasions, whenever they hear the sound of their own voices. There are people ready to assist us in every other emergency of our lives; but in the greatest difficulty of all, we are inhumanly left to help ourselves. There have been one or two rare occasions, on which one or two unparalleled women have nobly stepped

forward and relieved us of our humiliating position as speechless suitors, by taking all the embarrassment of making the offer on their own shoulders. I know an instance of this, and I feel bound to relate it, as a soothing and cheerful contrast to the harrowing anecdote which I have just told. Our curate where I live, has been all his life a martyr to shyness; and, but for the admirably decided conduct of his wife under trying circumstances, I happen to know that he would never have been the father of the ten sweet children who now enliven and adorn his existence. He was just in my miserable position, when he was kindly invited to tea (and muffins) one evening, by his charmer's agreeable mother. At the head of the table sat this estimable woman, in a new cap. At the foot of the table, sat her accomplished daughter, in a new gown. Between them sat my friend the curate, looking in speechless confusion at a plate of muffins placed exactly opposite to him. No other visitor marred the harmony of the domestic scene. They had a cup of tea all round, and a plate of muffins—and my friend never spoke. They had a second cup of tea, stronger than the first, and a second plate of muffins more richly buttered. Even this encouragement failed to loosen the curate's tongue. At the third cup, and pending the arrival of the third plate of muffins, the expressive eyes of the daughter rested significantly on the countenance of her maternal parent. "Mamma," she said, with a kind of silvery calmness. "Mamma, shall I have him?" "My dear," replied the indulgent lady, "Have I ever thwarted you in any of your little caprices? Please yourself, love; please yourself." The third plate of muffins came in. It was set down in solemn silence.

The mother took a bit encouragingly; the curate took a bit confusedly; the daughter took a bit meditatively. "I think," she said after a moment of charming reverie, "I think, Mamma, I will have him." She turned and looked critically at the curate; waited till he had, with great difficulty, disposed of a mouthful of muffin; and then held out her hand, with fascinating frankness. "There!" she said, "don't let us make a fuss about it. There is my hand!" Six weeks afterwards he was married, and has been the happiest man in existence ever since.

Such a case as this is, unfortunately, an exceptional one. It has been most hastily and most unwarrantably established as a social principle, that all men are audacious and enterprising in their love affairs, because they are men; and on these manifestly false grounds, the conclusion has been adopted that it is invariably the business of the man to make the offer. Dear, dear me! are we all Don Juans? Is there no such being in existence as a bashful man? On the other hand, are all young women naturally struck speechless with confusion at the mention of marriage? Do they all fall into such convulsions of modesty at the first prospect of assuming bridal responsibilities, as really to lose the admirable self-possession which is one of the

most charming attributes of the sex in every other circumstance of life? My own observation of the appearance and behaviour of brides and bridegrooms, under the trying ordeal of the wedding-day, inclines me to believe that the loss of self-possession is almost invariably on the man's side. It is my firm opinion (supposing my mind to be robust enough to support a firm opinion about anything) that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the offer of marriage would be much more quickly, sensibly, and irresistibly made if it came from the lady instead of the gentleman; and I would respectfully invite any man who disagrees with me to compare the behaviour of the bride with the behaviour of the bridegroom the next time he goes to a wedding. The wisdom of the ancients seems to have sanctioned some such salutary change of custom as that which I propose, at the period of Leap-year. But the practice has fallen into disuse; and the modest men of the community have suffered unspeakably in consequence.

If I only had the courage, I would suggest to some of those public-spirited ladies who are so nobly trying to take away from the men everything they have got, and to give it all to the women, that they might make out a very strong case against the male population, if they accused my grasping sex of monopolising the right of making offers. The first offer in the world was made, in that matter of the apple, by Eve, who was not bashful, to Adam, who was. Why have Eve's daughters (I would ask, if I were one of the public-spirited ladies) allowed the privilege exercised by their first mother to slip through their fingers in this disgraceful manner? What is the use of talking of the equality of the sexes as long as one sex perpetually exercises the right of putting the question, and leaves to the other sex only the inferior and secondary privilege of giving the answer? Let it be understood, for the future, that the men are to take their turn of waiting until they are spoken to. Let every other year be considered, for matrimonial purposes, a Leap Year, and give the unhappy bashful bachelor a good twelvemonth's chance of getting an offer. It may be objected, I know, that, even in the event of this wholesome reform in our manners being carried out, I could scarcely hope to be personally a gainer by it, seeing that my young woman is, according to my own confession, as retiring in her habits as I am myself. I can only answer to this, that I have noticed, on the few occasions when I have had opportunities of exercising my observation, a great difference to exist between the shyness of a woman and the shyness of a man. To refer to my own case, I have remarked that my charmer's shyness differs from mine in being manageable, graceful, and, more than that, in being capable of suppressing itself and of assuming a disguise of the most amazing coolness and self-possession on certain trying occasions. I have heard the object of my affections condemned by ignorant strangers as a young woman of unpleasantly audacious manners, at the very time when my intimate familiarity with her character assured me that she was

secretly suffering all the miseries of extreme confusion and self-distrust. Whenever I see her make up a bold face, by drawing her hair off her forehead, and showing the lovely roots all round; whenever I hear her talking with extraordinary perseverance, and laughing with extraordinary readiness; whenever I see her gown particularly large in pattern, and her ribbands dazlingly bright in colour—then, I feel certain that she is privately quaking with all the most indescribable and most unreasonable terrors of shyness. Knowing this, I should not be at all apprehensive of a long period of silence elapsing, if a reform in our social laws authorised my charmer to help me out by making my offer for me. She would do it, I know, with an appearance of extraordinary indifference and gaiety—with her utmost fluency of utterance, with her most mellifluously easy laughter—in her gown of the largest pattern, in her ribbands of the fiercest brightness with her poor heart thumping the whole time as if it would burst, and with every nerve in her body trembling all over from head to foot. My experience has not been a large one—but that is my humble idea of the real nature of a woman’s shyness.

However, it is useless to speculate on what might happen if the oppressive laws of courtship were relaxed—for no such welcome event is likely to take place. It will be more to the purpose, perhaps, if I venture on introducing a little practical suggestion of my own, which struck me while I was meditating on my unhappy position, which involves no sweeping change in the manners and customs of the age, and which, so far as I know, has never made its appearance in print before.

I am informed, by persons of experience in the world of letters (about which I myself know nothing), that the ladies of the present century have burst into every department of literature, have carried off the accumulated raw material from under the men’s noses, and have manufactured it to an enormous and unheard-of extent for the public benefit. I am told that out of every twelve poems or novels that are written, nine at least are by ladies; that they write histories, in six or eight volumes, with great ease and satisfaction to themselves, while the men can only compass the same achievements with extreme difficulty, in one or two volumes; and that they are perpetually producing books of Travel, which are all about themselves and their own sensations, without the slavish fear of that possible imputation of self-conceit, which so often lurks in the more timid bosom of man. I am particularly rejoiced to hear of this, because my suggestion involves nothing less than the writing of one gigantic book by all the ladies of Great Britain put together. What I propose is a Hand Book of Courtship, written by all British Wives, and edited, with notes, by all British Daughters.

The magnitude of my own idea absolutely takes away my breath—and yet, the execution of it is so unimaginably easy that the Hand Book might be ready for publication in six months' time. I propose that every Married Lady in the country shall write down the exact words (for surely her affectionate heart must remember them?) which her husband used when he made his offer to her; and that she shall then add to the interesting report of the offer, illustrative particulars of the circumstances under which it was made, and of the accompanying actions (if any) by which the speaker emphasised the all-important words as they fell from his lips. I would have the Returns, thus prepared, collected as the Income Tax Papers are, with the most extreme care and the most honourable secrecy. They should be afterwards shuffled together in baskets, and distributed, one by one, just as they happened to turn up, among the Unmarried Ladies of the country, with the following brief formula of two questions attached; First. Would the form of offer presented herewith, have proved to be a satisfactory one, in your case? And, if not, will you state in what particulars you think it might be improved? Second. Would the accompanying actions by which the offer was pressed on the kind attention of the individual addressed, have specially inclined you to favour it with a suitable reply? And, if not, what improvements, in the way of addition or suppression, would you be disposed, in the strictest confidence, to suggest? When the necessary answers to these questions had been given, I would have the Papers again collected, on the same Income Tax principle; and would immediately set the printers at work. The Married Ladies' Returns should form the text, and the Unmarried Ladies' Returns should be added in the form of notes. No names or addresses should appear anywhere. The book should be bound in virgin white, with orange-flower decorations on the back. It should be printed in rose-coloured ink, and it should be issued to the world from a publishing-house established for the purpose in Doctors' Commons.

What an inestimable bachelor's Manual this would be! What a circulation it would have among all classes! What a delightful sense of confidence it would awaken in the mind of the diffident male reader! How could any man go wrong, with the Hand Book to refer to, before he committed himself to a positive course of action? If I had such a book within my reach at this moment, I might look out, and learn, the form of offer which I felt to be most suitable in my own case; might discover and correct its little human imperfections, by reference to the critical notes appended to it; and might become a happy accepted man (if I could depend upon my memory) by to-morrow at latest. How many other men might enjoy the same benefit, if the practical results of the experience of others were thus placed at their disposal—how many extra marriages might be solemnised in the course of the first year after the publication of the Hand Book—I cannot presume to say. I can only

point to the serious necessity that there is for bringing out the great work that I have proposed—I can only implore the ladies to undertake it, in consideration of the literary honour and glory which it would confer upon the whole sex.

In the meantime, here I am, shyly hovering round my fate, and helplessly ignorant how to rush in and close with it, at once and for ever. If I could feel sure that the Bachelor's Manual was likely to be soon produced, I might, perhaps, manage to wait for it. But, in the absence of any positive information on this subject, I feel that I must make up my mind to do something desperate immediately. A spoken explanation of my feelings—unless I could manage to catch my young woman in the dark—being, in my case, manifestly out of the question, I suppose I must bashfully resign myself, after all, to the alternative of writing. In the event of my mustering courage enough to compose the letter, and to send it off when done, the question is, How had I better behave myself, when the inevitable embarrassment of the first meeting with her comes afterwards? Shall I begin with words, or begin with actions? Or, to be plainer still, which shall I address first, her waist or her mind? Will any charitable married lady kindly consider my especial weakness of disposition, and send me privately one word of advice as to which of these two delicate alternatives it will be safest for me to adopt?

Taken from *Household Words* 20 March 1858 XVII 313-316.

AWFUL WARNING TO BACHELORS.

IN the last week's number of this journal (to which I have grave objections, but which I read regularly for the purpose of exercising my critical ability as a finder of faults), there appeared an extremely absurd confession of weakness, called, "A Shy Scheme." The writer of the confession, not satisfied with exposing himself to public contempt, in the character of a Shy Young Man, was so obliging as to enter into details on the subject of his manners, his place of residence, and his personal appearance. I am about to give this feeble visionary a word of advice, and I am not at all afraid of being quite as particular as he has been, in describing myself at the outset. If my memory serves me, the Shy Young Man informed us all that his residence was in the country, that his hair was light, that his cheeks were rosy, that his stature was small, that his manners were mild, and that his name was Koddle. In reply, I have no hesitation in avowing that my residence is in London, that my hair is dark, that my cheeks are swarthy, that my stature is gigantic, that my manners are surly, and that my name is Grump. I have further to add, in opposition to the Shy Young Man, that I have the strongest possible antipathy to being settled in life; and that, if I thought either of my eyes were capable of fixing itself on a young woman, I would shut that eye up, by an effort of will, henceforth and for ever. I don't say this is good writing; but I call it straightforward common sense. If any man is bold enough to contradict me, I should like to meet him outside the office of this journal, at an hour of the morning when the street is tolerably empty, and the policeman happens to be at the opposite extremity of his beat.

How do I propose to enlighten and fortify the Shy Young Man? I intend to teach him the results of my own experience. If he has one grain of sense in his whole composition, he may profit by the lesson, and may step out of the absurd situation in which he has now placed himself. I have not the slightest feeling of friendship for this imbecile person. It is merely a little whim of mine to try if I cannot separate him from his young woman. I see his young woman in my mind's eye, even from his miserable description of her. Complexion of the colour of cold boiled veal, white eyelashes, watery eyes, red hands with black mittens on them, raw elbows, sickly smile,—form plump and shapeless,—kicks her gown when she walks, —stiff in the back-bone when she sits down, and embarrassed by her own legs when she gets up. I know the sort of girl, and I detest her. If I can make her sweetheart look at her with my unprejudiced eyes, I shall have accomplished my object to my own entire satisfaction. This is, perhaps, not a gallant way of expressing myself. Never mind that. There is

plenty of gallant writing at the present time, for those who want to be flattered. Let the women take a little rudeness now, by way of a change.

Would anybody think that I was once a lady's man? I was,—and, what is more, I was once in love, was once anxious to be settled in life, was once on the point of making an offer. I had settled how to do it, when to do it, where to do it. Not the slightest doubt of success crossed my mind. I believed then, as I believe now, that any man may win any woman, at any time, and under any circumstances. If I had been rejected the first time, I would have proposed again. If I had been rejected a second time, I would have proposed again. If I had been rejected a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth time, I would have proposed again and again and again,—and I should have ended by carrying my point. I knew that, and yet, at the eleventh hour, I shrank from making my offer. What altered my resolution? A book. Yes, that very Bachelor's Manual, which the Shy Young Man is so anxious to lay his hand on, was the awful warning that stopped me, in the nick of time, from the insanity of investing myself in a matrimonial speculation. I tell Mr. Koddle that the sort of book he wants has been in existence for years; and I ask his best attention to a narrative of the effect which that publication had upon my mind, when I was young enough and weak enough to allow myself to fall in love.

It was on a Monday morning that I first said to myself (while shaving), "I'll make that woman promise to marry me on Wednesday next, at from half-past one to a quarter to two P.M." Later in the day, a friend came to see me. He remarked the more than usual radiant and agreeable expression of my countenance.

"You look as if you were going out courting" said he.

"I think of putting my foot in it, for the first time, on Wednesday next," said I.

"Would you object to my making you a little present?" said he.

"No, I shouldn't," said I.

He took his leave. An hour afterwards, a very small, very thin, very square, parcel arrived for me. I opened it, and found a book inside, called *The Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony*. I read the book on the spot. The effect of it was, first, to fill me with feelings of the deepest gratitude towards the friend who had sent it to me as a joke; and, secondly, to inspire me with such a horror of

Courtship and Matrimony, that I instantly gave up all idea of making my proposed offer, and resolved to consult my own convenience, by preserving a bachelor's freedom to the end of my days.

To state the proposition, generally, at the outset, I assert that the whole end and object of the Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony is to insult, persecute, and degrade the bridegroom. I first became satisfied of this disgraceful fact at page thirty-six of the Hand Book or Manual. In the earlier part of the volume it was assumed that I had fallen in love, had made my offer, and had been accepted by my young woman and her family. Etiquette is hard on my heels all through those preliminary processes, and finally runs me down as soon as I appear in the character of an engaged man. My behaviour in my future wife's company is of the last importance—and there Etiquette has me, and never lets me go again. "In private," says the Manual, "the slightest approach to familiarity must be avoided, as it will always be resented by a woman who deserves to be a wife." So! I may be brimming over with affection—I may even have put on a soft waistcoat expressly for the purpose—but I am never to clasp my future wife with rapture to my bosom—I am never to print upon her soft cheek a momentary impression of the pattern of my upper shirt-stud! She is to keep me at arm's length, in private as well as in public—and I am actually expected to believe, all the time, that she is devotedly attached to me! First insult.

A little further on (page thirty-eight) the family have their fling at me. I "must not presume to take my stand, thus prematurely, as a member of the family, nor affect that exceeding intimacy which leads," et cetera. Thus, the father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins, all keep me at arm's length as well as the bride. Second insult.

First persecution. During my engagement, I am to be "very particular, and even punctilious in my dress. My visits, which, for the most part, we may presume will occur in the evening, should be made invariably in evening dress." Indeed? I have been at my office all day—I have dined at my lonely chop-house. I fly, at the risk of indigestion, with my "follow-chop" and my love contending for the uppermost place in my bosom, to the door of my charmer. I suddenly stop with my hand on the knocker, remember that I have a pair of grey trousers on, and turn away again to case my legs in black kerseymere, to change my coloured shirt, to make pomatum pills and rub them into my hair, to put fresh scent on my handkerchief and a flower in my dress-coat, to send for a cab, and to drive up, at last, to my young woman's door, as if she had asked me to a party. When I get in, does she slip into the back dining-room and privately

reward me for my black kerseymere, my pomatum pills, and my scented handkerchief? Not she! She receives me, in the drawing-room, at arm's length; and her family receive me at arm's length, also. And what does Etiquette expect of me, under those circumstances, for the rest of the evening? Here it is at page forty-three. I "must never be out of spirits but when my fair one is sad—never animated but when she is cheerful; her slightest wish must be my law, her most trifling fancy the guiding-star of my conduct. In coming to her, I must show no appreciation of time, distance, or fatigue"—By Jupiter! if this does not disclose the existence of an organised plan for the harassing of bridegrooms, I should like to know what does? I put it to the women themselves: Are you any of you really worth all that? You know you're not! What would you privately think of a man who was afraid to come and see you of an evening in grey trousers, and who tried to conceal from you that his poor corns ached a little after a long walk? You would privately think him a fool. And so do I, publicly.

Second persecution—in case the wretched bridegroom has survived the first. As the wedding-day approaches, I "must come out of the bright halo of my happiness" (happiness!) "into the cold, grey, actual daylight of the world of business." I must "burn all my bachelor letters"—(why I should like to know?) "and part with, it may be, some few of my bachelor connections"—(does this mean "some few" of my relations, my blood relations who adore the very ground I tread on?) and I must, finally, "bid a long farewell to all bachelor friends!—" Did you say all? O, hell-kite!-all? "Yes, there it is in print, at page sixty-two. My affectionate tendencies, my grey trousers, my comfortable shooting jacket, my appreciation of time, distance, or fatigue, my bachelor letters, my few connections, my bachelor friends—all must disappear before this devouring Moloch in petticoats. Nothing is left me—nothing but my evening costume and the prospect of being married!

After the insults and persecutions, minor troubles envelope me previous to the commencement of the wedding-day degradations. All the responsibility of getting Moloch's wedding-ring is thrown on me. It must not be too thin, or Moloch, in course of years, will wear it out; it must not be too large, or Moloch's finger will let it drop off. If I am self-distrustful (and how can I be otherwise, after the severe discipline to which I have submitted during the courtship?), I must get at Moloch's size through the intervention of Moloch's sister; and when I have purchased the ring, I must be very careful to keep it in the left-hand corner of my right-hand waistcoat-pocket, to be ready at a moment's notice for the clerk when he asks me for it. Having grappled with all these difficulties, my next piece of work is to get my bridegroomsmen. I must be very particular in selecting them.

They must be limited in number to the number of the bridesmaids, one for each. They must be young and unmarried, they should be handsome, they cannot fail to be good-humoured, they ought to be well dressed, their apparel should be light and elegant, they should wear dress coats. The bride sends white gloves, wrapped in white paper and tied with white ribbon, to each of the bridesmaids; and I must do the same to each of the bridegroomsman. My own costume is to be “a blue coat, light grey trousers, white satin or silk waistcoat, ornamental tie, and white (not primrose-coloured) gloves.” Pleasant! Having insulted and persecuted me all through the courtship, Etiquette, on my wedding morning, strips me even of my evening costume, clothes me in an ornamental tie and a white satin waistcoat, and produces me maliciously before the public eye in the Character of an outrageous snob.

We now come to the Bridegroom’s First Degradation. It is the morning of the marriage; and the wedding-party is setting out for the church. Here is Etiquette’s order of the carriages:

In the first carriage, the principal bridesmaid and bridegroomsman.

“In the second carriage, the second bridesmaid and the bridegroom’s mother.

Other carriages, with bridesmaids and friends, the carriages of the bridesmaids taking precedence.

“ In the last carriage the bride and her father.”

Where is the Bridegroom in the programme? Nowhere. Not even a hackney cab provided for him! How does he get to church? Does he run, in his ornamental tie and white satin waistcoat, behind one of the carriages? Or has he a seat on the box? Or does he walk, accompanied by two policemen, to prevent him from taking the only sensible course left,—in other words, from running away? We hear nothing of him till it is time for him to undergo his Second Degradation; and then we find him waiting in the vestry, “where he must take care to have arrived some time previously to the hour appointed.” Observe the artfulness with which this second degradation is managed! If the bridegroom only arrived at the church door five minutes before the appointed hour, he would appear in the estimable character of a rigidly punctual man, who knew the value of time (especially when you have an ornamental tie, and a white satin waistcoat to put on), and who was determined not to waste the precious moments on his wedding-morning. But Etiquette insists on making a contemptible fool of him all through. The beadle, the clerk, the pew-opener, and the general public must all

see him “kicking his heels “ to no earthly purpose, some time before the hour when he, and the beadle, and the clerk, and the pew-opener all know that he is wanted. Consider the bride dashing up to the church-door with her train of carriages; then, look at the forlorn snob in light grey trousers, humbled by insult and wasted by persecution, who has been dancing attendance “some time previously to the hour appointed,” in a lonely vestry; and then say if Etiquette does not punish the lords of creation severely for the offence of getting married!

But the offence is committed—the marriage has been perpetrated—the wedding-party returns to breakfast; the bridegroom, this time, having a place in the first carriage, because the Law has made a man of him at last, in spite of the bride and her family. But the persecutions are not over yet. They assume a small, spiteful, social character, in terror of the aforesaid Law. The breakfast is eaten. Drink, the last refuge of the wretched, partially revives the unhappy man who has been kicking his heels in the vestry. He begins to lose the galling sense of his white satin waistcoat; he forgets that he is personally disfigured for the occasion by an ornamental tie. At that first moment of comfort, vindictive Etiquette goads him onto his legs, and insists, no matter whether he can do it or not, on his making a speech. He has hardly had time to breakdown, and resume his chair before Etiquette sends the bride out of the room to put on her travelling dress. The door has hardly closed on her, when a fiend (assuming the form of a bachelor friend) attacks him with “a short address” (see page seventy-nine), to which he is “ expected to respond.” Give him time to show his light grey trousers once more to the company, above the horizon of the tablecloth—give him time to break down again —and the bride re-appears, ready for the journey. This is the last chance the family have, for some time to come, of making the bridegroom uncomfortable; and Etiquette shows them how to take the meanest possible advantage of it:

“The young bride, divested of her bridal attire, and quietly costumed for the journey, now bids farewell to her bridesmaids and lady friends. Some natural tears spring to her gentle eyes as she takes a last look at the home she is now leaving. The servants venture to crowd to her with their humble though heartfelt congratulations; and, finally, melting, she falls weeping on her mother’s bosom. A short cough is heard, as of some one summoning up resolution. It is her father. He dare not trust his voice; but holds out his hand, gives her one kiss, and then leads her, half turning back, down the stairs and through the hall, to the door, where he delivers her to her husband; who hands her’ quickly to the carriage, leaps in lightly after her, waves his hand to the

party, who appear crowding to the windows, half smiles to the throng about the door, then gives the word, and they are off, and started on the voyage of life!”

There are some parts of this final programme of persecution to which I have no objection. I rather like the idea of the father being obliged to express parental grief by the same means which he would employ to express bronchitis—a short cough. I am also gratified to find that Etiquette involves him in the serious gymnastic difficulty of taking his daughter down-stairs, and of “half turning back “ at the same time. But here all sentiments of approval, on my part, end. From the foregoing passage I draw the inference—as every one else must—that the bridegroom is kept waiting at the street-door for the bride, just as a begging-letter impostor is kept waiting at the street-door for an answer. And, when she does come down, what does the triply degraded man find to reward him for waiting? Part of a woman only; the rest having melted on the mother’s bosom. Part of a woman, I say again, with a red nose, and cheeks bedabbled with tears. And what am I, the bridegroom, expected to do under these circumstances? To hand what the mother’s bosom and the father’s short cough have left me, “quickly into the carriage,” and to “leap in lightly” after it. Lightly? After what I have gone through, there must be a considerable spring in my light grey trousers to enable me to do that.

I pursue the subject no further. The new Divorce Court occupies the ground beyond me; and I make it a rule never to interfere with the vested interests of others. I have followed a Man, by the lurid light of Etiquette, from his Courtship to his Marriage; and there I leave him with emotions of sympathy for which the English language affords me no adequate means of expression. I defy British families (being a bachelor, I am not the least afraid of them) to point out in any other mortal affair which a man can go through, such an existing system of social persecution against the individual as that which is attached to the business of courting and marrying when a man undertakes it in this country. There is the book with the code of inhuman laws against the unoffending bridegroom, for every one to refer to. Let the Shy Young Man get it, and properly test my accuracy of quotation; and then let him say whether he is still prepared to keep his eye on his young woman, after he knows the penalties which attach to letting it rove in that dangerous direction. No such Awful Warning to Bachelors has been published in my time as the small volume on the Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony, which I now close with a shudder henceforth and for ever.

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SEA-BREEZES WITH THE LONDON SMACK.

THROW up the window; come into the balcony—here we are, my dear, at the seaside.

Yes! we have actually got away from town. I survey the ocean instead of the opposite houses, I smell sea-weed and salt water instead of smoke. Looking in the glass, I see myself reflected in a costume which would be the ruin of my character for respectability if I wore it in my own street. Turning affectionately towards my wife, I behold a saucy-looking hat on her head instead of her usual quiet bonnet. Thirty years ago, when she was a young girl, she would have set off her youth and beauty becomingly. Now, it makes her look, singularly enough, many years older than she really is. I dare not acknowledge it to her, I hardly venture to confess it to myself, but a middle-aged woman in a girl's hat is scarcely a less anomalous sight, to my eyes, than a middle-aged woman would be in a girl's short frock and frilled trousers. However, as no Englishwoman appears to consider herself too old for a hat at the sea-side—not, as I observe in some instances, even when she wears a wig—I have no right to remonstrate with my wife, who is still on the right side of fifty. Let us keep to our national peculiarities, and let no antics in costume be too ridiculous for us when we are away from home.

Well, as I said before, we have actually got away from town. What induces me to repeat that extremely common-place phrase? What sinister influence is making me begin to doubt, in defiance of the view from the window, in defiance of our conjugal change of costume, in defiance of the salt-water smell in my very nostrils, whether we have absolutely left London behind us, after all? Surely it must be the organ playing before the next house? Yes! A London organ has followed us to our refuge on the coast, playing the well-known London tunes; bringing us back by the force of the most disagreeable of all its associations, to our street at home. Can I order the dirty, leering Italian vagabond to take himself out of hearing? No; for here, at the sea-side, I am not a housekeeper. The merciful consideration of the English law for all men who live by the perpetration of nuisances; necessarily protects the organ and abandons *me*. There was a case in point, the other day, in the paper. A gentleman occupied in making some elaborate calculations connected with important public works, charges an organ grinder with interrupting his employment, and with refusing to move out of hearing. The magistrate looks at the Act, finds that 'nobody but a housekeeper has any legal right to protection from organs, ascertains that the gentleman whose occupation has been fatally interrupted is a lodger only, and, as a matter of technical necessity, dismisses the application. Evidently I can hope for no chance of peace and quiet in my new abode unless I

can get my landlady to complain for me. She has a family of eight small children, and no one to look after them but herself. Can I expect her to find time to appeal to the local magistrate perpetually, on my behalf, even supposing (which is not at all probable) that the Police Act extends to this place? Certainly not. This is a pleasant prospect, if I look to the future. I shall do better, however, if I occupy myself with the present only, and make my escape from those hateful London tunes which are taking me back to town faster than the express train itself brought me away from it. Let me forget that I am a tax-paying citizen who helps to support his country, and let me leave the musical foreign invader who helps to burden it, master of the field.

I take my hat and fly. I hurry down the lane; through the short-cut at the back of the stables; along the dusty little street where the post-office is; round the corner by the chemist's shop; past the blank wall with the lettered board and plump pointing hand in white paint on it, which obligingly informs me that I am on my way to The Esplanade. I am out of hearing of the organ at last, and the happy result follows—London takes its proper place, invisible and inaudible in the far distance, and the joyous excursionist who writes these lines feels gratefully that he is at the sea-side again.

The Esplanade is long, and the Marine Buildings beyond it are longer. The two lead me on, as I dawdle forward mechanically, to the Pier. What sounds are borne towards me by the sea-breezes? The notes of a brass band. What do I see as I advance? As I live, London again! London, under another musical form, following me to the sea-side! There they are, the gentlemanly German instrumentalists; the classical, orchestral, strictly professional street band; which carries its long-legged music-desks about with it, and plays elaborate works by great masters, and indulges in the luxury of a conductor to keep it in perfect order. Only last week these accomplished sons of Orpheus drove me from my desk in London; and here they are now, taking the free air itself into custody, and making the atmosphere metropolitan even by the sea-side!

Again I turn my back on the enemy; again I fly from the sea-breeze with the London smack. Retracing my steps, I get out of the town altogether, ascend the cliff, and walk on till I find a lonely gully descending steeply to the beach. I follow the downward path, and come out on the sands. The tide is at the ebb; and the flat rocks near at hand are richly brown and green with sea weed. The long pools of water lie out beyond them under the high sun, as still in their blue brightness as if they were fragments of the sky set for gems in the bosom of the earth. Farther yet, the faint, idle sea shows its white wave-edges thinly and wearily on the moist brownness of the sand. Over the low horizon hangs a mist of heat which veils the

hulls of distant ships, and lets the sails above shine through softly, hanging cloud-like on the sky. The sultry silence is so intense that in the intervals of the sea-whispering along the margin of the beach, I can hear the hum of insects on a sunny spot of the cliff above my head. Where the first shade offers, I lie down on the dry sand, and give myself up gratefully to the stillness of the hour and the beauty of the scene.

My mind wanders insensibly towards a certain train of familiar and favourite thoughts, which may one day take form and place, and go out from me into the world to ask such welcome as they may deserve from the minds of others. My stick traces strange figures on the sand; my eyes look absently out to sea; my attention to external things dwindles and dwindles till nothing is left of it. Although I am physically wide awake, I am mentally fast asleep and dreaming—dreaming happily, but not for long. Sudden as a flash of lightning, a strange sound darts into my ears, and startles me in one cruel moment from my trance. Powers above! What spectre appears before me as if it had risen out of the sand? Have I taken leave of my senses, or is this vagrant stranger who has stolen on me suddenly, the sturdy old Frenchman with the husky voice, the guitar, and the dancing dog—the very same individual who sang before my area railings in town not three days since? It is—it is the man. London again! London in the loneliest sea-shore nook that I can find a hundred miles away from the sound of Bow bells!

Thus far, the town element has presented itself to me in the character of a visitor like myself. A very few days' experience, however, of my new abode suffices to reveal it in another form—in an unmistakably settled and resident aspect.

The shops, for example, are not the characteristic offspring of the country and the sea-side—they are the poor relations and abject imitators of the shops in London. What business has my marine butcher to be a copy in miniature of my metropolitan butcher? Why does he display nothing in the least degree suggestive of his own peculiar locality? I am disgusted with the man for not wearing a Guernsey frock, for not having salt provisions in his shop, for not chopping his meat on a ship's barrel. I object to his London awning when the sun shines—why is it not a sail? How dare his young man who comes for orders take me back to town by being just as greasy of head and just as blue in costume as the young man who comes in London? Only yesterday, I distinctly saw him bring us our joint in the usual wooden tray. What does he mean by not reminding me that I am at the sea-side by carrying it in a net?

Last Wednesday, we had a cold dinner. I sent for pickles—the local pickles, I said distinctly, expecting to receive and eager to relish, something brinily characteristic of the coast. There arrived instead, the familiar London bottle from Soho Square, with the familiar London label, informing me that what my pickles had lost in attractiveness of colour they had gained in genuineness of composition. Vainly the waves murmured, vainly the salt breeze blew. Soho Square asserted itself against both, in the middle of the table; and made our dinner a London meal. Our first breakfast was spoilt in a similar manner. I came down-stairs in high spirits, characteristically dressed in a monkey jacket, characteristically humming *The Bay of Biscay*. The very first object that met my view on the breakfast table was a half-quartern loaf that might have come out of Saint Giles's.

The postman again—I am so angry with the postman that I feel inclined to hit him every time he hands me a letter. I put it to any moderate reader, whether a marine post man is not bound to give us a hail instead of a knock? “House, ahoy!”—surely he ought to say, “House, a-hoy!”? Instead of doing any thing of the sort, he, too, sets up the London element at the sea-side, by knocking like a London postman. Nay more, he carries the base imitation a point farther, by being violently angry with the servant if he is kept waiting an instant at the door. How am I to derive benefit from the sea-side when this licensed tyrant comes twice a day to take me back to town again?

There are some walks about our neighbourhood here, some exceedingly pretty' inland walks, which I am given to understand are in the country. I certainly do see cornfields and lanes, trees, ditches, stiles, cottages, windmills, and so on. And yet, I really don't know. The other day, when I thought I was walking, in pastoral solitude, along a lonely road, I was! overtaken by an Omnibus. I could hardly believe my eyes. I said to myself, incredulously, “No, no; this is either a waggon or a bathing machine.” I looked again, and a Conductor, an active, all-observing Cockney Conductor, hopped up on a London footboard, and “plied” me with uplifted hand as if I had been in Holborn.

This afternoon, the rain has come at last; and we have been obliged to stop indoors and amuse ourselves by looking out of window. What goes by in the street, as dinner-time approaches? A fly—one of the London sort, which tries to look like a private brougham—carrying a gentleman inside, in formal evening costume, with that look of mournful expectation and suffering self-importance, peculiar to Englishmen on their way to festive assemblies. This is a very bad sign; the worst I have seen yet. Here are the visitors themselves conspiring to poison the fresh sea-side with the unwholesome metropolitan atmosphere. Why go to London dinner-

parties, in London costume, here? Why not get away from town customs and town amusements, and establish something which is characteristic in a social way of the free ocean on whose borders we live? “Mr. and Mrs. Jones request the company of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, to box the compass. Small and early. Bathing-gowns and slippers. Grog and shrimps.” Why not establish some such marine form of invitation as this? Why not strengthen the conviction even in our most festive moments, that we are still at the sea-side?

I am sorry to observe it, but my own servant-girl, my once trustworthy and attached housemaid, whom I have brought here for the benefit of her health, has rewarded her master’s kindness by using his marine residence as if it was his London house. One night I come back late from my walk, and I find her enjoying the cool air of the evening at the area gate here, just as I see her enjoying it at the area gate in town. Nay, more, as I approach nearer in the dusk, I find that she has got a follower on the other side of the rails. As a man, I have learnt philosophy; as a master, I am proverbially indulgent towards the little frailties of my domestics. Abstractedly speaking, the discovery of the housemaid’s new sweetheart does not discompose me. My anger is solely aroused by the entire absence of characteristic local peculiarity in the reigning follower. The area Lothario of the sea-side is a base repetition of the area Lothario in town. He has the same mysterious slouch in his walk; the same sinister compromise in his apparel, between the dress of a broken down gentleman and a prosperous artisan. He has also the one singularly dreary method of courting the opposite sex, which obtains among all his class. He stands mutely staring at the beloved object, first on one leg, then on the other: he varies the proceeding by looking first over one shoulder, then over the other; he occasionally whistles, he occasionally scratches his head, he occasionally says, “Well, I must be off.” Exactly like the man in London—in the smallest particulars, the very image of the man in London. No smell of shrimps about him, a stick in his hand instead of a boathook, a long-tailed coat in place of a blue jacket. What do I hear my servant saying to him? Just what she says under similar circumstances in town,—“Fine evening, ain’t it?” Wretched girl! why not be characteristic, and say “How’s the wind?” Why not offer his trousers to wash, and his grog, too, to make? Think of the sea breezes, Mary, and be a tight lass, a trim little craft, a bumboat-woman—anything, anything but a London housemaid.

And yet, what right have I to expect a marine course of conduct from my servant, when her betters set her the example of importing the London element? Here are the “swells” on the pier, surveying the sea. through their opera-glasses, exactly as they survey the audience at the theatre in London.. There are the ladies on the Esplanade, with nothing that is not metropolitan about them, except their

hats. The same spread of petticoat, the same circumambient hoops, the same critical intensity of expression when they look at each other as they pass—just like Regent Street. Regent Street, did I say? here is a shabby man, doing his best to complete the disastrous analogy by thrusting a bill into my hand as I walk by him. What is it? Concert at the Assembly Rooms. Ha! Something appropriate to the locality here, surely? Madrigals of the forecastle? Fishermen’s choruses? The song of the stroke-oar, and the coxswain’s catch? Let me repair to the Assembly Room. London again—stop my grog, if here is not London again! The charming young vocalist in pink satin, the youthful tenor with the wavy hair, the fatherly-looking bass with the dingy gloves. Selection from the *Trovatore*, airs from *La Traviata*. Ball later in the evening, under the direction of Mr. Whiff, from London. No chance, no change, no local character. The sound of Bow-bells and the sound of the waves always together, go where I may.

It is of no use, I suppose, to complain of this anomalous condition of things at the sea-side, or to offer any suggestions towards banishing the intrusive London element from the region of the coast. So far as I can see, the artificial taste of the present day appears to relish the sea-breeze with the London smack. One observation, however, I must positively take leave to make before I conclude. It is inconceivable to me how such a phrase as “going out of town,” continues to exist in the language. The sooner we study correctness of expression, and banish such an absurd form of words from our vocabulary the better. Instead of telling each other that we are going out of town, let us henceforth approach nearer to the truth, and say that we are going to remove from Metropolitan to Marine London. That phrase is, I submit, strictly descriptive of what we all do now, when we leave the city for the coast—excepting, of course, the case of any enterprising individual who may be fortunate enough to make a watering-place for himself on a desert island. At present I can only call to mind one British visitor to the sea-side who is entitled to assert that he has really been out of town. That visitor is Robinson Crusoe.

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