JEROME KLAPKA JEROME

IDLE IDEAS IN 1905

Джером Джером

Idle Ideas in 1905

Джером Д. К.

Idle Ideas in 1905 / Д. К. Джером — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Jerome K. Jerome
Idle Ideas in 1905

ARE WE AS INTERESTING AS WE THINK WE ARE?

"Charmed. Very hot weather we've been having of late – I mean cold. Let me see, I did not quite catch your name just now. Thank you so much. Yes, it is a bit close." And a silence falls, neither of us being able to think what next to say.

What has happened is this: My host has met me in the doorway, and shaken me heartily by the hand.

"So glad you were able to come," he has said. "Some friends of mine here, very anxious to meet you." He has bustled me across the room. "Delightful people. You'll like them – have read all your books."

He has brought me up to a stately lady, and has presented me. We have exchanged the customary commonplaces, and she, I feel, is waiting for me to say something clever, original and tactful. And I don't know whether she is Presbyterian or Mormon; a Protectionist or a Free Trader; whether she is engaged to be married or has lately been divorced!

A friend of mine adopts the sensible plan of always providing you with a short history of the person to whom he is about to lead you.

"I want to introduce you to a Mrs. Jones," he whispers. "Clever woman. Wrote a book two years ago. Forget the name of it. Something about twins. Keep away from sausages. Father ran a pork shop in the Borough. Husband on the Stock Exchange. Keep off coke. Unpleasantness about a company. You'll get on best by sticking to the book. Lot in it about platonic friendship. Don't seem to be looking too closely at her. Has a slight squint she tries to hide."

By this time we have reached the lady, and he introduces me as a friend of his who is simply dying to know her.

"Wants to talk about your book," he explains. "Disagrees with you entirely on the subject of platonic friendship. Sure you'll be able to convince him."

It saves us both a deal of trouble. I start at once on platonic friendship, and ask her questions about twins, avoiding sausages and coke. She thinks me an unusually interesting man, and I am less bored than otherwise I might be.

I have sometimes thought it would be a serviceable device if, in Society, we all of us wore a neat card – pinned, say, upon our back – setting forth such information as was necessary; our name legibly written, and how to be pronounced; our age (not necessarily in good faith, but for purposes of conversation. Once I seriously hurt a German lady by demanding of her information about the Franco-German war. She looked to me as if she could not object to being taken for forty. It turned out she was thirty-seven. Had I not been an Englishman I might have had to fight a duel); our religious and political beliefs; together with a list of the subjects we were most at home upon; and a few facts concerning our career – sufficient to save the stranger from, what is vulgarly termed "putting his foot in it." Before making jokes about "Dumping," or discussing the question of Chinese Cheap Labour, one would glance behind and note whether one's companion was ticketed "Whole-hogger," or "Pro-Boer." Guests desirous of agreeable partners – an "agreeable person," according to the late Lord Beaconsfield's definition, being "a person who agrees with you" – could make their own selection.

"Excuse me. Would you mind turning round a minute? Ah, 'Wagnerian Crank!' I am afraid we should not get on together. I prefer the Italian school."

Or, "How delightful. I see you don't believe in vaccination. May I take you into supper?"

Those, on the other hand, fond of argument would choose a suitable opponent. A master of ceremonies might be provided who would stand in the centre of the room and call for partners: "Lady with strong views in favour of female franchise wishes to meet gentleman holding the opinions of St. Paul. With view to argument."

An American lady, a year or two ago, wrote me a letter that did me real good: she appreciated my work with so much understanding, criticised it with such sympathetic interest. She added that, when in England the summer before, she had been on the point of accepting an invitation to meet me; but at the last moment she had changed her mind; she felt so sure – she put it pleasantly, but this is what it came to – that in my own proper person I should fall short of her expectations. For my own sake I felt sorry she had cried off; it would have been worth something to have met so sensible a woman. An author introduced to people who have read – or who say that they have read – his books, feels always like a man taken for the first time to be shown to his future wife's relations. They are very pleasant. They try to put him at his ease. But he knows instinctively they are disappointed with him. I remember, when a very young man, attending a party at which a famous American humorist was the chief guest. I was standing close behind a lady who was talking to her husband.

"He doesn't look a bit funny," said the lady.

"Great Scott!" answered her husband. "How did you expect him to look? Did you think he would have a red nose and a patch over one eye?"

"Oh, well, he might look funnier than that, anyhow," retorted the lady, highly dissatisfied. "It isn't worth coming for."

We all know the story of the hostess who, leaning across the table during the dessert, requested of the funny man that he would kindly say something amusing soon, because the dear children were waiting to go to bed. Children, I suppose, have no use for funny people who don't choose to be funny. I once invited a friend down to my house for a Saturday to Monday. He is an entertaining man, and before he came I dilated on his powers of humour – somewhat foolishly perhaps – in the presence of a certain youthful person who resides with me, and who listens when she oughtn't to, and never when she ought. He happened not to be in a humorous mood that evening. My young relation, after dinner, climbed upon my knee. For quite five minutes she sat silent. Then she whispered:

"Has he said anything funny?"

"Hush. No, not yet; don't be silly."

Five minutes later: "Was that funny?"

"No, of course not."

"Why not?"

"Because – can't you hear? We are talking about Old Age Pensions."

"What's that?"

"Oh, it's – oh, never mind now. It isn't a subject on which one can be funny."

"Then what's he want to talk about it for?"

She waited for another quarter of an hour. Then, evidently bored, and much to my relief, suggested herself that she might as well go to bed. She ran to me the next morning in the garden with an air of triumph.

"He said something so funny last night," she told me.

"Oh, what was it?" I inquired. It seemed to me I must have missed it.

"Well, I can't exactly 'member it," she explained, "not just at the moment. But it was so funny. I dreamed it, you know."

For folks not Lions, but closely related to Lions, introductions must be trying ordeals. You tell them that for years you have been yearning to meet them. You assure them, in a voice trembling with emotion, that this is indeed a privilege. You go on to add that when a boy —

At this point they have to interrupt you to explain that they are not the Mr. So-and-So, but only his cousin or his grandfather; and all you can think of to say is: "Oh, I'm so sorry."

I had a nephew who was once the amateur long-distance bicycle champion. I have him still, but he is stouter and has come down to a motor car. In sporting circles I was always introduced as "Shorland's Uncle." Close-cropped young men would gaze at me with rapture; and then inquire: "And do you do anything yourself, Mr. Jerome?"

But my case was not so bad as that of a friend of mine, a doctor. He married a leading actress, and was known ever afterwards as "Miss B – 's husband."

At public dinners, where one takes one's seat for the evening next to someone that one possibly has never met before, and is never likely to meet again, conversation is difficult and dangerous. I remember talking to a lady at a Vagabond Club dinner. She asked me during the *entree*– with a light laugh, as I afterwards recalled – what I thought, candidly, of the last book of a certain celebrated authoress. I told her, and a coldness sprang up between us. She happened to be the certain celebrated authoress; she had changed her place at the last moment so as to avoid sitting next to another lady novelist, whom she hated.

One has to shift oneself, sometimes, on these occasions. A newspaper man came up to me last Ninth of November at the Mansion House.

"Would you mind changing seats with me?" he asked. "It's a bit awkward. They've put me next to my first wife."

I had a troubled evening myself once long ago. I accompanied a young widow lady to a musical At Home, given by a lady who had more acquaintances than she knew. We met the butler at the top of the stairs. My friend spoke first:

"Say Mrs. Dash and – "

The butler did not wait for more – he was a youngish man – but shouted out:

"Mr. and Mrs. Dash."

"My dear! how very quiet you have kept!" cried our hostess delighted. "Do let me congratulate you."

The crush was too great and our hostess too distracted at the moment for any explanations. We were swept away, and both of us spent the remainder of the evening feebly protesting our singleness.

If it had happened on the stage it would have taken us the whole play to get out of it. Stage people are not allowed to put things right when mistakes are made with their identity. If the light comedian is expecting a plumber, the first man that comes into the drawing-room has got to be a plumber. He is not allowed to point out that he never was a plumber; that he doesn't look like a plumber; that no one not an idiot would mistake him for a plumber. He has got to be shut up in the bath-room and have water poured over him, just as if he were a plumber – a stage plumber, that is. Not till right away at the end of the last act is he permitted to remark that he happens to be the new curate.

I sat out a play once at which most people laughed. It made me sad. A dear old lady entered towards the end of the first act. We knew she was the aunt. Nobody can possibly mistake the stage aunt – except the people on the stage. They, of course, mistook her for a circus rider, and shut her up in a cupboard. It is what cupboards seem to be reserved for on the stage. Nothing is ever put in them excepting the hero's relations. When she wasn't in the cupboard she was in a clothes basket, or tied up in a curtain. All she need have done was to hold on to something while remarking to the hero:

"If you'll stop shouting and jumping about for just ten seconds, and give me a chance to observe that I am your maiden aunt from Devonshire, all this tomfoolery can be avoided."

That would have ended it. As a matter of fact that did end it five minutes past eleven. It hadn't occurred to her to say it before.

In real life I never knew but of one case where a man suffered in silence unpleasantness he could have ended with a word; and that was the case of the late Corney Grain. He had been engaged to give his entertainment at a country house. The lady was a *nouvelle riche* of snobbish instincts. She left instructions that Corney Grain when he arrived was to dine with the servants. The butler, who

knew better, apologised; but Corney was a man not easily disconcerted. He dined well, and after dinner rose and addressed the assembled company.

"Well, now, my good friends," said Corney, "if we have all finished, and if you are all agreeable, I shall be pleased to present to you my little show."

The servants cheered. The piano was dispensed with. Corney contrived to amuse his audience very well for half-an-hour without it. At ten o'clock came down a message: Would Mr. Corney Grain come up into the drawing-room. Corney went. The company in the drawing-room were waiting, seated.

"We are ready, Mr. Grain," remarked the hostess.

"Ready for what?" demanded Corney.

"For your entertainment," answered the hostess.

"But I have given it already," explained Corney; "and my engagement was for one performance only."

"Given it! Where? When?"

"An hour ago, downstairs."

"But this is nonsense," exclaimed the hostess.

"It seemed to me somewhat unusual," Corney replied; "but it has always been my privilege to dine with the company I am asked to entertain. I took it you had arranged a little treat for the servants."

And Corney left to catch his train.

Another entertainer told me the following story, although a joke against himself. He and Corney Grain were sharing a cottage on the river. A man called early one morning to discuss affairs, and was talking to Corney in the parlour, which was on the ground floor. The window was open. The other entertainer – the man who told me the story – was dressing in the room above. Thinking he recognised the voice of the visitor below, he leant out of his bedroom window to hear better. He leant too far, and dived head foremost into a bed of flowers, his bare legs – and only his bare legs – showing through the open window of the parlour.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the visitor, turning at the moment and seeing a pair of wriggling legs above the window sill; "who's that?"

Corney fixed his eyeglass and strolled to the window.

"Oh, it's only What's-his-name," he explained. "Wonderful spirits. Can be funny in the morning."

SHOULD WOMEN BE BEAUTIFUL?

Pretty women are going to have a hard time of it later on. Hitherto, they have had things far too much their own way. In the future there are going to be no pretty girls, for the simple reason there will be no plain girls against which to contrast them. Of late I have done some systematic reading of ladies' papers. The plain girl submits to a course of "treatment." In eighteen months she bursts upon Society an acknowledged beauty. And it is all done by kindness. One girl writes:

"Only a little while ago I used to look at myself in the glass and cry. Now I look at myself and laugh."

The letter is accompanied by two photographs of the young lady. I should have cried myself had I seen her as she was at first. She was a stumpy, flat-headed, squat-nosed, cross-eyed thing. She did not even look good. One virtue she appears to have had, however. It was faith. She believed what the label said, she did what the label told her. She is now a tall, ravishing young person, her only trouble being, I should say, to know what to do with her hair – it reaches to her knees and must be a nuisance to her. She would do better to give some of it away. Taking this young lady as a text, it means that the girl who declines to be a dream of loveliness does so out of obstinacy. What the raw material may be does not appear to matter. Provided no feature is absolutely missing, the result is one and the same.

Arrived at years of discretion, the maiden proceeds to choose the style of beauty she prefers. Will she be a Juno, a Venus, or a Helen? Will she have a Grecian nose, or one tip-tilted like the petal of a rose? Let her try the tip-tilted style first. The professor has an idea it is going to be fashionable. If afterwards she does not like it, there will be time to try the Grecian. It is difficult to decide these points without experiment.

Would the lady like a high or a low forehead? Some ladies like to look intelligent. It is purely a matter of taste. With the Grecian nose, the low broad forehead perhaps goes better. It is more according to precedent. On the other hand, the high brainy forehead would be more original. It is for the lady herself to select.

We come to the question of eyes. The lady fancies a delicate blue, not too pronounced a colour – one of those useful shades that go with almost everything. At the same time there should be depth and passion. The professor understands exactly the sort of eye the lady means. But it will be expensive. There is a cheap quality; the professor does not recommend it. True that it passes muster by gaslight, but the sunlight shows it up. It lacks tenderness, and at the price you can hardly expect it to contain much hidden meaning. The professor advises the melting, Oh-George-take-me-in-your-arms-and-still-my-foolish-fears brand. It costs a little more, but it pays for itself in the end.

Perhaps it will be best, now the eye has been fixed upon, to discuss the question of the hair. The professor opens his book of patterns. Maybe the lady is of a wilful disposition. She loves to run laughing through the woods during exceptionally rainy weather; or to gallop across the downs without a hat, her fair ringlets streaming in the wind, the old family coachman panting and expostulating in the rear. If one may trust the popular novel, extremely satisfactory husbands have often been secured in this way. You naturally look at a girl who is walking through a wood, laughing heartily apparently for no other reason than because it is raining – who rides at stretch gallop without a hat. If you have nothing else to do, you follow her. It is always on the cards that such a girl may do something really amusing before she gets home. Thus things begin.

To a girl of this kind, naturally curly hair is essential. It must be the sort of hair that looks better when it is soaking wet. The bottle of stuff that makes this particular hair to grow may be considered dear, if you think merely of the price. But that is not the way to look at it. "What is it going to do for me?" That is what the girl has got to ask herself. It does not do to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar, as the saying is. If you are going to be a dashing, wilful beauty, you must have the hair for it, or the whole scheme falls to the ground.

Eyebrows and eyelashes, the professor assumes, the lady would like to match the hair. Too much eccentricity the professor does not agree with. Nature, after all, is the best guide; neatness combined with taste, that is the ideal to be aimed at. The eyebrows should be almost straight, the professor thinks; the eyelashes long and silky, with just the suspicion of a curl. The professor would also suggest a little less cheekbone. Cheekbones are being worn low this season.

Will the lady have a dimpled chin, or does she fancy the square-cut jaw? Maybe the square-cut jaw and the firm, sweet mouth are more suitable for the married woman. They go well enough with the baby and the tea-urn, and the strong, proud man in the background. For the unmarried girl the dimpled chin and the rosebud mouth are, perhaps, on the whole safer. Some gentlemen are so nervous of that firm, square jaw. For the present, at all events, let us keep to the rosebud and the dimple.

Complexion! Well, there is only one complexion worth considering – a creamy white, relieved by delicate peach pink. It goes with everything, and is always effective. Rich olives, striking pallors – yes, you hear of these things doing well. The professor's experience, however, is that for all-round work you will never improve upon the plain white and pink. It is less liable to get out of order, and is the easiest at all times to renew.

For the figure, the professor recommends something lithe and supple. Five foot four is a good height, but that is a point that should be discussed first with the dressmaker. For trains, five foot six is, perhaps, preferable. But for the sporting girl, who has to wear short frocks, that height would, of course, be impossible.

The bust and the waist are also points on which the dressmaker should be consulted. Nothing should be done in a hurry. What is the fashion going to be for the next two or three seasons? There are styles demanding that beginning at the neck you should curve out, like a pouter pigeon. There is apparently no difficulty whatever in obtaining this result. But if crinolines, for instance, are likely to come in again! The lady has only to imagine it for herself: the effect might be grotesque, suggestive of a walking hour-glass. So, too, with the waist. For some fashions it is better to have it just a foot from the neck. At other times it is more useful lower down. The lady will kindly think over these details and let the professor know. While one is about it, one may as well make a sound job.

It is all so simple, and, when you come to think of it, really not expensive. Age, apparently, makes no difference. A woman is as old as she looks. In future, I take it, there will be no ladies over five-and-twenty. Wrinkles! Why any lady should still persist in wearing them is a mystery to me. With a moderate amount of care any middle-class woman could save enough out of the housekeeping money in a month to get rid of every one of them. Grey hair! Well, of course, if you cling to grey hair, there is no more to be said. But to ladies who would just as soon have rich wavy-brown or a delicate shade of gold, I would point out that there are one hundred and forty-seven inexpensive lotions on the market, any one of which, rubbed gently into the head with a tooth-brush (not too hard) just before going to bed will, to use a colloquialism, do the trick.

Are you too stout, or are you too thin? All you have to do is to say which, and enclose stamps. But do not make a mistake and send for the wrong recipe. If you are already too thin, you might in consequence suddenly disappear before you found out your mistake. One very stout lady I knew worked at herself for eighteen months and got stouter every day. This discouraged her so much that she gave up trying. No doubt she had made a muddle and had sent for the wrong bottle, but she would not listen to further advice. She said she was tired of the whole thing.

In future years there will be no need for a young man to look about him for a wife; he will take the nearest girl, tell her his ideal, and, if she really care for him, she will go to the shop and have herself fixed up to his pattern. In certain Eastern countries, I believe, something of this kind is done. A gentleman desirous of adding to his family sends round the neighbourhood the weight and size of his favourite wife, hinting that if another can be found of the same proportions, there is room for her. Fathers walk round among their daughters, choose the most likely specimen, and have her fattened up. That is their brutal Eastern way. Out West we shall be more delicate. Match-making

mothers will probably revive the old confession book. Eligible bachelors will be invited to fill in a page: “Your favourite height in women,” “Your favourite measurement round the waist,” “Do you like brunettes or blondes?”

The choice will be left to the girls.

“I do think Henry William just too sweet for words,” the maiden of the future will murmur to herself. Gently, coyly, she will draw from him his ideal of what a woman should be. In from six months to a year she will burst upon him, the perfect She; height, size, weight, right to a T. He will clasp her in his arms.

“At last,” he will cry, “I have found her, the woman of my dreams.”

And if he does not change his mind, and the bottles do not begin to lose their effect, there will be every chance that they will be happy ever afterwards.

Might not Science go even further? Why rest satisfied with making a world of merely beautiful women? Cannot Science, while she is about it, make them all good at the same time. I do not apologise for the suggestion. I used to think all women beautiful and good. It is their own papers that have disillusioned me. I used to look at this lady or at that – shyly, when nobody seemed to be noticing me – and think how fair she was, how stately. Now I only wonder who is her chemist.

They used to tell me, when I was a little boy, that girls were made of sugar and spice. I know better now. I have read the recipes in the Answers to Correspondents.

When I was quite a young man I used to sit in dark corners and listen, with swelling heart, while people at the piano told me where little girl babies got their wonderful eyes from, of the things they did to them in heaven that gave them dimples. Ah me! I wish now I had never come across those ladies’ papers. I know the stuff that causes those bewitching eyes. I know the shop where they make those dimples; I have passed it and looked in. I thought they were produced by angels’ kisses, but there was not an angel about the place, that I could see. Perhaps I have also been deceived as regards their goodness. Maybe all women are not so perfect as in the popular short story they appear to be. That is why I suggest that Science should proceed still further, and make them all as beautiful in mind as she is now able to make them in body. May we not live to see in the advertisement columns of the ladies’ paper of the future the portrait of a young girl sulking in a corner – “Before taking the lotion!” The same girl dancing among her little brothers and sisters, shedding sunlight through the home – “After the three first bottles!” May we not have the Caudle Mixture: One tablespoonful at bed-time guaranteed to make the lady murmur, “Good-night, dear; hope you’ll sleep well,” and at once to fall asleep, her lips parted in a smile? Maybe some specialist of the future will advertise Mind Massage: “Warranted to remove from the most obstinate subject all traces of hatred, envy, and malice.”

And, when Science has done everything possible for women, there might be no harm in her turning her attention to us men. Her idea at present seems to be that we men are too beautiful, physically and morally, to need improvement. Personally, there are one or two points about which I should like to consult her.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO BE MERRY?

There is so much I could do to improve things generally in and about Europe, if only I had a free hand. I should not propose any great fundamental changes. These poor people have got used to their own ways; it would be unwise to reform them all at once. But there are many little odds and ends that I could do for them, so many of their mistakes I could correct for them. They do not know this. If they only knew there was a man living in their midst willing to take them in hand and arrange things for them, how glad they would be. But the story is always the same. One reads it in the advertisements of the matrimonial column:

"A lady, young, said to be good-looking" – she herself is not sure on the point; she feels that possibly she may be prejudiced; she puts before you merely the current gossip of the neighbourhood; people say she is beautiful; they may be right, they may be wrong: it is not for her to decide – "well-educated, of affectionate disposition, possessed of means, desires to meet gentleman with a view to matrimony."

Immediately underneath one reads of a gentleman of twenty-eight, "tall, fair, considered agreeable." Really the modesty of the matrimonial advertiser teaches to us ordinary mortals quite a beautiful lesson. I know instinctively that were anybody to ask me suddenly:

"Do you call yourself an agreeable man?" I should answer promptly:

"An agreeable man! Of course I'm an agreeable man. What silly questions you do ask!" If he persisted in arguing the matter, saying:

"But there are people who do not consider you an agreeable man." I should get angry with him.

"Oh, they think that, do they?" I should say. "Well, you tell them from me, with my compliments, that they are a set of blithering idiots. Not agreeable! You show me the man who says I'm not agreeable. I'll soon let him know whether I'm agreeable or not."

These young men seeking a wife are silent on the subject of their own virtues. Such are for others to discover. The matrimonial advertiser confines himself to a simple statement of fact: "he is considered agreeable." He is domestically inclined, and in receipt of a good income. He is desirous of meeting a lady of serious disposition, with view to matrimony. If possessed of means – well, it is a trifle hardly worth considering one way or the other. He does not insist upon it; on the other hand he does not exclude ladies of means; the main idea is matrimony.

It is sad to reflect upon a young lady, said to be good-looking (let us say good-looking and be done with it: a neighbourhood does not rise up and declare a girl good-looking if she is not good-looking, that is only her modest way of putting it), let us say a young lady, good-looking, well-educated, of affectionate disposition – it is undeniably sad to reflect that such an one, matrimonially inclined, should be compelled to have recourse to the columns of a matrimonial journal. What are the young men in the neighbourhood thinking of? What more do they want? Is it Venus come to life again with ten thousand a year that they are waiting for! It makes me angry with my own sex reading these advertisements. And when one thinks of the girls that do get married!

But life is a mystery. The fact remains: here is the ideal wife seeking in vain for a husband. And here, immediately underneath – I will not say the ideal husband, he may have faults; none of us are perfect, but as men go a decided acquisition to any domestic hearth, an agreeable gentleman, fond of home life, none of your gad-abouts – calls aloud to the four winds for a wife – any sort of a wife, provided she be of a serious disposition. In his despair, he has grown indifferent to all other considerations. "Is there in this world," he has said to himself, "one unmarried woman, willing to marry me, an agreeable man, in receipt of a good income." Possibly enough this twain have passed one another in the street, have sat side by side in the same tram-car, never guessing, each one, that the other was the very article of which they were in want to make life beautiful.

Mistresses in search of a servant, not so much with the idea of getting work out of her, rather with the object of making her happy, advertise on one page. On the opposite page, domestic treasures – disciples of Carlyle, apparently, with a passionate love of work for its own sake – are seeking situations, not so much with the desire of gain as with the hope of finding openings where they may enjoy the luxury of feeling they are leading useful lives. These philanthropic mistresses, these toil-loving hand-maidens, have lived side by side in the same town for years, never knowing one another.

So it is with these poor European peoples. They pass me in the street. They do not guess that I am ready and willing to take them under my care, to teach them common sense with a smattering of intelligence – to be, as one might say, a father to them. They look at me. There is nothing about me to tell them that I know what is good for them better than they do themselves. In the fairy tales the wise man wore a conical hat and a long robe with twiddly things all round the edge. You knew he was a clever man. It avoided the necessity of explanation. Unfortunately, the fashion has gone out. We wise men have to wear just ordinary clothes. Nobody knows we are wise men. Even when we tell them so, they don't believe it. This it is that makes our task the more difficult.

One of the first things I should take in hand, were European affairs handed over to my control, would be the rearrangement of the Carnival. As matters are, the Carnival takes place all over Europe in February. At Nice, in Spain, or in Italy, it may be occasionally possible to feel you want to dance about the streets in thin costume during February. But in more northern countries during Carnival time I have seen only one sensible masker; he was a man who had got himself up as a diver. It was in Antwerp. The rain was pouring down in torrents; a cheery, boisterous John Bull sort of an east wind was blustering through the streets at the rate of fifteen miles an hour. Pierrots, with frozen hands, were blowing blue noses. An elderly Cupid had borrowed an umbrella from a café and was waiting for a tram. A very little devil was crying with the cold, and wiping his eyes with the end of his own tail. Every doorway was crowded with shivering maskers. The diver alone walked erect, the water streaming from him.

February is not the month for open air masquerading. The "confetti," which has come to be nothing but coloured paper cut into small discs, is a sodden mass. When a lump of it strikes you in the eye, your instinct is not to laugh gaily, but to find out the man who threw it and to hit him back. This is not the true spirit of Carnival. The marvel is that, in spite of the almost invariably adverse weather, these Carnivals still continue. In Belgium, where Romanism still remains the dominant religion, Carnival maintains itself stronger than elsewhere in Northern Europe.

At one small town, Binche, near the French border, it holds uninterrupted sway for three days and two nights, during which time the whole of the population, swelled by visitors from twenty miles round, shouts, romps, eats and drinks and dances. After which the visitors are packed like sardines into railway trains. They pin their tickets to their coats and promptly go to sleep. At every station the railway officials stumble up and down the trains with lanterns. The last feeble effort of the more wakeful reveller, before he adds himself to the heap of snoring humanity on the floor of the railway carriage, is to change the tickets of a couple of his unconscious companions. In this way gentlemen for the east are dragged out by the legs at junctions, and packed into trains going west; while southern fathers are shot out in the chill dawn at lonely northern stations, to find themselves greeted with enthusiasm by other people's families.

At Binche, they say – I have not counted them myself – that thirty thousand maskers can be seen dancing at the same time. When they are not dancing they are throwing oranges at one another. The houses board up their windows. The restaurants take down their mirrors and hide away the glasses. If I went masquerading at Binche I should go as a man in armour, period Henry the Seventh.

"Doesn't it hurt," I asked a lady who had been there, "having oranges thrown at you? Which sort do they use, speaking generally, those fine juicy ones – Javas I think you call them – or the little hard brand with skins like a nutmeg-grater? And if both sorts are used indiscriminately, which do you personally prefer?"

"The smart people," she answered, "they are the same everywhere – they must be extravagant – they use the Java orange. If it hits you in the back I prefer the Java orange. It is more messy than the other, but it does not leave you with that curious sensation of having been temporarily stunned. Most people, of course, make use of the small hard orange. If you duck in time, and so catch it on the top of your head, it does not hurt so much as you would think. If, however, it hits you on a tender place – well, myself, I always find that a little sal volatile, with old cognac – half and half, you understand – is about the best thing. But it only happens once a year," she added.

Nearly every town gives prizes for the best group of maskers. In some cases the first prize amounts to as much as two hundred pounds. The butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, join together and compete. They arrive in wagons, each group with its band. Free trade is encouraged. Each neighbouring town and village "dumps" its load of picturesque merry-makers.

It is in these smaller towns that the spirit of King Carnival finds happiest expression. Almost every third inhabitant takes part in the fun. In Brussels and the larger towns the thing appears ridiculous. A few hundred maskers force their way with difficulty through thousands of dull-clad spectators, looking like a Spanish river in the summer time, a feeble stream, dribbling through acres of muddy bank. At Charleroi, the centre of the Belgian Black Country, the chief feature of the Carnival is the dancing of the children. A space is specially roped off for them.

If by chance the sun is kind enough to shine, the sight is a pretty one. How they love the dressing up and the acting, these small mites! One young hussy – she could hardly have been more than ten – was gotten up as a haughty young lady. Maybe some elder sister had served as a model. She wore a tremendous wig of flaxen hair, a hat that I guarantee would have made its mark even at Ascot on the Cup Day, a skirt that trailed two yards behind her, a pair of what had once been white kid gloves, and a blue silk parasol. Dignity! I have seen the offended barmaid, I have met the chorus girl – not by appointment, please don't misunderstand me, merely as a spectator – up the river on Sunday. But never have I witnessed in any human being so much hauteur to the pound *avoir-dupois* as was carried through the streets of Charleroi by that small brat. Companions of other days, mere vulgar boys and girls, claimed acquaintance with her. She passed them with a stare of such utter disdain that it sent them tumbling over one another backwards. By the time they had recovered themselves sufficiently to think of an old tin kettle lying handy in the gutter she had turned the corner.

Two miserably clad urchins, unable to scrape together the few *sous* necessary for the hire of a rag or two, had nevertheless determined not to be altogether out of it. They had managed to borrow a couple of white blouses – not what you would understand by a white blouse, dear Madame, a dainty thing of frills and laces, but the coarse white sack the street sweeper wears over his clothes. They had also borrowed a couple of brooms. Ridiculous little objects they looked, the tiny head of each showing above the great white shroud as gravely they walked, the one behind the other, sweeping the mud into the gutter. They also were of the Carnival, playing at being scavengers.

Another quaint sight I witnessed. The "serpentin" is a feature of the Belgian Carnival. It is a strip of coloured paper, some dozen yards long, perhaps. You fling it as you would a lassoo, entangling the head of some passer-by. Naturally, the object most aimed at by the Belgian youth is the Belgian maiden. And, naturally also, the maiden who finds herself most entangled is the maiden who – to use again the language of the matrimonial advertiser – "is considered good-looking." The serpentin about her head is the "feather in her cap" of the Belgian maiden on Carnival Day. Coming suddenly round the corner I almost ran into a girl. Her back was towards me. It was a quiet street. She had half a dozen of these serpentins. Hurriedly, with trembling hands, she was twisting them round and round her own head. I looked at her as I passed. She flushed scarlet. Poor little snub-nosed pasty-faced woman! I wish she had not seen me. I could have bought sixpenny-worth, followed her, and tormented her with them; while she would have pretended indignation – sought, discreetly, to escape from me.

Down South, where the blood flows quicker, King Carnival is, indeed, a jolly old soul. In Munich he reigns for six weeks, the end coming with a mad two days revel in the streets. During

the whole of the period, folks in ordinary, every-day costume are regarded as curiosities; people wonder what they are up to. From the Grafin to the Dienstmädchen, from the Herr Professor to the "Piccolo," as they term the small artist that answers to our page boy, the business of Munich is dancing, somewhere, somehow, in a fancy costume. Every theatre clears away the stage, every café crowds its chairs and tables into corners, the very streets are cleared for dancing. Munich goes mad.

Munich is always a little mad. The maddest ball I ever danced at was in Munich. I went there with a Harvard University professor. He had been told what these balls were like. Ever seeking knowledge of all things, he determined to take the matter up for himself and examine it. The writer also must ever be learning. I agreed to accompany him. We had not intended to dance. Our idea was that we could be indulgent spectators, regarding from some coign of vantage the antics of the foolish crowd. The professor was clad as became a professor. Myself, I wore a simply-cut frock-coat, with trousering in French grey. The doorkeeper explained to us that this was a costume ball; he was sorry, but gentlemen could only be admitted in evening dress or in masquerade.

It was half past one in the morning. We had sat up late on purpose; we had gone without our dinner; we had walked two miles. The professor suggested pinning up the tails of his clerically-cut coat and turning in his waistcoat. The doorkeeper feared it would not be quite the same thing. Besides, my French grey trousers refused to adapt themselves. The doorkeeper proposed our hiring a costume – a little speculation of his own; gentlemen found it simpler sometimes, especially married gentlemen, to hire a costume in this manner, changing back into sober garments before returning home. It reduced the volume of necessary explanation.

"Have you anything, my good man," said the professor, "anything that would effect a complete disguise?"

The doorkeeper had the very thing – a Chinese arrangement, with combined mask and wig. It fitted neatly over the head, and was provided with a simple but ingenious piece of mechanism by means of which much could be done with the pigtail. Myself the doorkeeper hid from view under the cowl of a Carmelite monk.

"I do hope nobody recognises us," whispered my friend the professor as we entered.

I can only hope sincerely that they did not. I do not wish to talk about myself. That would be egotism. But the mystery of the professor troubles me to this day. A grave, earnest gentleman, the father of a family, I saw him with my own eyes put that ridiculous pasteboard mask over his head. Later on – a good deal later on – I found myself walking again with him through silent star-lit streets. Where he had been in the interval, and who then was the strange creature under the Chinaman's mask, will always remain to me an unsolved problem.

DO WE LIE A-BED TOO LATE?

It was in Paris, many years ago, that I fell by chance into this habit of early rising. My night – by reasons that I need not enter into – had been a troubled one. Tired of the hot bed that gave no sleep, I rose and dressed myself, crept down the creaking stairs, experiencing the sensations of a burglar new to his profession, unbolted the great door of the hotel, and passed out into an unknown, silent city, bathed in a mysterious soft light. Since then, this strange sweet city of the dawn has never ceased to call to me. It may be in London, in Paris again, in Brussels, Berlin, Vienna, that I have gone to sleep, but if perchance I wake before the returning tide of human life has dimmed its glories with the mists and vapours of the noisy day, I know that beyond my window blind the fairy city, as I saw it first so many years ago – this city that knows no tears, no sorrow, through which there creeps no evil thing; this city of quiet vistas, fading into hope; this city of far-off voices whispering peace; this city of the dawn that still is young – invites me to talk with it awhile before the waking hours drive it before them, and with a sigh it passes whence it came.

It is the great city's one hour of purity, of dignity. The very rag-picker, groping with her filthy hands among the ashes, instead of an object of contempt, moves from door to door an accusing Figure, her thin soiled garments, her bent body, her scarred face, hideous with the wounds of poverty, an eloquent indictment of smug Injustice, sleeping behind its deaf shutters. Yet even into her dim brain has sunk the peace that fills for this brief hour the city. This, too, shall have its end, my sister! Men and women were not born to live on the husks that fill the pails outside the rich man's door. Courage a little while longer, you and yours. Your rheumy eyes once were bright, your thin locks once soft and wavy, your poor bent back once straight; and maybe, as they tell you in their gilded churches, this bulging sack shall be lifted from your weary shoulders, your misshapen limbs be straight again. You pass not altogether unheeded through these empty streets. Not all the eyes of the universe are sleeping.

The little seamstress, hurrying to her early work! A little later she will be one of the foolish crowd, joining in the foolish laughter, in the coarse jests of the work-room: but as yet the hot day has not claimed her. The work-room is far beyond, the home of mean cares and sordid struggles far behind. To her, also, in this moment are the sweet thoughts of womanhood. She puts down her bag, rests herself upon a seat. If all the day were dawn, this city of the morning always with us! A neighbouring clock chimes forth the hour. She starts up from her dream and hurries on – to the noisy work-room.

A pair of lovers cross the park, holding each other's hands. They will return later in the day, but there will be another expression in their eyes, another meaning in the pressure of their hands. Now the purity of the morning is with them.

Some fat, middle-aged clerk comes puffing into view: his ridiculous little figure very podgy. He stops to take off his hat and mop his bald head with his handkerchief: even to him the morning lends romance. His fleshy face changes almost as one looks at him. One sees again the lad with his vague hopes, his absurd ambitions.

There is a statue of Aphrodite in one of the smaller Paris parks. Twice in the same week, without particularly meaning it, I found myself early in the morning standing in front of this statue gazing listlessly at it, as one does when in dreamy mood; and on both occasions, turning to go, I encountered the same man, also gazing at it with, apparently, listless eyes. He was an uninteresting looking man – possibly he thought the same of me. From his dress he might have been a well-to-do tradesman, a minor Government official, doctor, or lawyer. Quite ten years later I paid my third visit to the same statue at about the same hour. This time he was there before me. I was hidden from him by some bushes. He glanced round but did not see me; and then he did a curious thing. Placing his hands on the top of the pedestal, which may have been some seven feet in height, he drew himself up, and kissed very gently, almost reverentially, the foot of the statue, begrimed though it was with

the city's dirt. Had he been some long-haired student of the Latin Quarter one would not have been so astonished. But he was such a very commonplace, quite respectable looking man. Afterwards he drew a pipe from his pocket, carefully filled and lighted it, took his umbrella from the seat where it had been lying, and walked away.

Had it been their meeting-place long ago? Had he been wont to tell her, gazing at her with lover's eyes, how like she was to the statue? The French sculptor has not to consider Mrs. Grundy. Maybe, the lady, raising her eyes, had been confused; perhaps for a moment angry – some little milliner or governess, one supposes. In France the *jeune fille* of good family does not meet her lover unattended. What had happened? Or was it but the vagrant fancy of a middle-aged bourgeois seeking in imagination the romance that reality so rarely gives us, weaving his love dream round his changeless statue?

In one of Ibsen's bitter comedies the lovers agree to part while they are still young, never to see each other in the flesh again. Into the future each will bear away the image of the other, godlike, radiant with the glory of youth and love; each will cherish the memory of a loved one who shall be beautiful always. That their parting may not appear such wild nonsense as at first it strikes us, Ibsen shows us other lovers who have married in the orthodox fashion. She was all that a mistress should be. They speak of her as they first knew her fifteen years ago, when every man was at her feet. He then was a young student, burning with fine ideals, with enthusiasm for all the humanities.

They enter.

What did you expect? Fifteen years have passed – fifteen years of struggle with the grim realities. He is fat and bald. Eleven children have to be provided for. High ideals will not even pay the bootmaker. To exist you have to fight for mean ends with mean weapons. And the sweet girl heroine! Now the worried mother of eleven brats! One rings down the curtain amid Satanic laughter.

That is why, for one reason among so many, I love this mystic morning light. It has a strange power of revealing the beauty that is hidden from us by the coarser beams of the full day. These worn men and women, grown so foolish looking, so unromantic; these artisans and petty clerks plodding to their monotonous day's work; these dull-eyed women of the people on their way to market to haggle over *sous*, to argue and contend over paltry handfuls of food. In this magic morning light the disguising body becomes transparent. They have grown beautiful, not ugly, with the years of toil and hardship; these lives, lived so patiently, are consecrated to the service of the world. Joy, hope, pleasure – they have done with all such, life for them is over. Yet they labour, ceaselessly, uncomplainingly. It is for the children.

One morning, near Brussels, I encountered a cart of faggots, drawn by a hound so lean that stroking him might have hurt a dainty hand. I was shocked – angry, till I noticed his fellow beast of burden pushing the cart from behind. Such a scarecrow of an old woman! There was little to choose between them. I walked with them a little way. She lived near Waterloo. All day she gathered wood in the great forest, and starting at three o'clock each morning, the two lean creatures between them dragged the cart nine miles to Brussels, returning when they had sold their load. With luck she might reckon on a couple of francs. I asked her if she could not find something else to do.

Yes, it was possible, but for the little one, her grandchild. Folks will not employ old women burdened with grandchildren.

You fair, dainty ladies, who would never know it was morning if somebody did not enter to pull up the blind and tell you so! You do well not to venture out in this magic morning light. You would look so plain – almost ugly, by the side of these beautiful women.

It is curious the attraction the Church has always possessed for the marketing classes. Christ drove them from the Temple, but still, in every continental city, they cluster round its outer walls. It makes a charming picture on a sunny morning, the great cathedral with its massive shadow forming the background; splashed about its feet, like a parterre of gay flowers around the trunk of some old

tree, the women, young girls in their many coloured costumes, sitting before their piled-up baskets of green vegetables, of shining fruits.

In Brussels the chief market is held on the Grande Place. The great gilded houses have looked down upon much the same scene every morning these four hundred years. In summer time it commences about half-past four; by five o'clock it is a roaring hive, the great city round about still sleeping.

Here comes the thrifty housewife of the poor, to whom the difference of a tenth of a penny in the price of a cabbage is all-important, and the much harassed keeper of the petty *pension*. There are houses in Brussels where they will feed you, light you, sleep you, wait on you, for two francs a day. Withered old ladies, ancient governesses, who will teach you for forty centimes an hour, gather round these ricketty tables, wolf up the thin soup, grumble at the watery coffee, help themselves with unladylike greediness to the potato pie. It must need careful housewifery to keep these poor creatures on two francs a day and make a profit for yourself. So "Madame," the much-grumbled-at, who has gone to bed about twelve, rises a little before five, makes her way down with her basket. Thus a few *sous* may be saved upon the day's economies.

Sometimes it is a mere child who is the little housekeeper. One thinks that perhaps this early training in the art of haggling may not be good for her. Already there is a hard expression in the childish eyes, mean lines about the little mouth. The finer qualities of humanity are expensive luxuries, not to be afforded by the poor.

They overwork their patient dogs, and underfeed them. During the two hours' market the poor beasts, still fastened to their little "chariots," rest in the open space about the neighbouring Bourse. They snatch at what you throw them; they do not even thank you with a wag of the tail. Gratitude! Politeness! What mean you? We have not heard of such. We only work. Some of them amid all the din lie sleeping between their shafts. Some are licking one another's sores. One would they were better treated; alas! their owners, likewise, are overworked and underfed, housed in kennels no better. But if the majority in every society were not overworked and underfed and meanly housed, why, then the minority could not be underworked and overfed and housed luxuriously. But this is talk to which no respectable reader can be expected to listen.

They are one babel of bargaining, these markets. The purchaser selects a cauliflower. Fortunately, cauliflowers have no feelings, or probably it would burst into tears at the expression with which it is regarded. It is impossible that any lady should desire such a cauliflower. Still, out of mere curiosity, she would know the price – that is, if the owner of the cauliflower is not too much ashamed of it to name a price.

The owner of the cauliflower suggests six *sous*. The thing is too ridiculous for argument. The purchaser breaks into a laugh.

The owner of the cauliflower is stung. She points out the beauties of that cauliflower. Apparently it is the cauliflower out of all her stock she loves the best; a better cauliflower never lived; if there were more cauliflowers in the world like this particular cauliflower things might be different. She gives a sketch of the cauliflower's career, from its youth upwards. Hard enough it will be for her when the hour for parting from it comes. If the other lady has not sufficient knowledge of cauliflowers to appreciate it, will she kindly not paw it about, but put it down and go away, and never let the owner of the cauliflower see her again.

The other lady, more as a friend than as a purchaser, points out the cauliflower's defects. She wishes well to the owner of the cauliflower, and would like to teach her something about her business. A lady who thinks such a cauliflower worth six *sous* can never hope to succeed as a cauliflower vendor. Has she really taken the trouble to examine the cauliflower for herself, or has love made her blind to its shortcomings?

The owner of the cauliflower is too indignant to reply. She snatches it away, appears to be comforting it, replaces it in the basket. The other lady is grieved at human obstinacy and stupidity in

general. If the owner of the cauliflower had had any sense she would have asked four *sous*. Eventually business is done at five.

It is the custom everywhere abroad – asking the price of a thing is simply opening conversation. A lady told me that, the first day she began housekeeping in Florence, she handed over to a poulterer for a chicken the price he had demanded – with protestations that he was losing on the transaction, but wanted, for family reasons, apparently, to get rid of the chicken. He stood for half a minute staring at her, and then, being an honest sort of man, threw in a pigeon.

Foreign housekeepers starting business in London appear hurt when our tradesmen decline to accept half-a-crown for articles marked three-and-six.

"Then why mark it only three-and-sixpence?" is the foreign housekeeper's argument.

SHOULD MARRIED MEN PLAY GOLF?

That we Englishmen attach too much importance to sport goes without saying – or, rather, it has been said so often as to have become a commonplace. One of these days some reforming English novelist will write a book, showing the evil effects of over-indulgence in sport: the neglected business, the ruined home, the slow but sure sapping of the brain – what there may have been of it in the beginning – leading to semi-imbecility and yearly increasing obesity.

A young couple, I once heard of, went for their honeymoon to Scotland. The poor girl did not know he was a golfer (he had wooed and won her during a period of idleness enforced by a sprained shoulder), or maybe she would have avoided Scotland. The idea they started with was that of a tour. The second day the man went out for a stroll by himself. At dinner-time he observed, with a far-away look in his eyes, that it seemed a pretty spot they had struck, and suggested their staying there another day. The next morning after breakfast he borrowed a club from the hotel porter, and remarked that he would take a walk while she finished doing her hair. He said it amused him, swinging a club while he walked. He returned in time for lunch and seemed moody all the afternoon. He said the air suited him, and urged that they should linger yet another day.

She was young and inexperienced, and thought, maybe, it was liver. She had heard much about liver from her father. The next morning he borrowed more clubs, and went out, this time before breakfast, returning to a late and not over sociable dinner. That was the end of their honeymoon so far as she was concerned. He meant well, but the thing had gone too far. The vice had entered into his blood, and the smell of the links drove out all other considerations.

We are most of us familiar, I take it, with the story of the golfing parson, who could not keep from swearing when the balls went wrong.

"Golf and the ministry don't seem to go together," his friend told him. "Take my advice before it's too late, and give it up, Tammas."

A few months later Tammas met his friend again.

"You were right, Jamie," cried the parson cheerily, "they didna run well in harness; golf and the meenistry, I hae followed your advice: I hae gi'en it oop."

"Then what are ye doing with that sack of clubs?" inquired Jamie.

"What am I doing with them?" repeated the puzzled Tammas. "Why I am going to play golf with them." A light broke upon him. "Great Heavens, man!" he continued, "ye didna' think 'twas the golf I'd gi'en oop?"

The Englishman does not understand play. He makes a life-long labour of his sport, and to it sacrifices mind and body. The health resorts of Europe – to paraphrase a famous saying that nobody appears to have said – draw half their profits from the playing fields of Eton and elsewhere. In Swiss and German kurhausen enormously fat men bear down upon you and explain to you that once they were the champion sprinters or the high-jump representatives of their university – men who now hold on to the bannisters and groan as they haul themselves upstairs. Consumptive men, between paroxysms of coughing, tell you of the goals they scored when they were half-backs or forwards of extraordinary ability. Ex-light-weight amateur pugilists, with the figure now of an American roll-top desk, butt you into a corner of the billiard-room, and, surprised they cannot get as near you as they would desire, whisper to you the secret of avoiding the undercut by the swiftness of the backward leap. Broken-down tennis players, one-legged skaters, dropsical gentlemen-riders, are to be met with hobbling on crutches along every highway of the Engadine.

They are pitiable objects. Never having learnt to read anything but the sporting papers, books are of no use to them. They never wasted much of their youth on thought, and, apparently, have lost the knack of it. They don't care for art, and Nature only suggests to them the things they can no longer do. The snow-clad mountain reminds them that once they were daring tobogannists; the undulating

common makes them sad because they can no longer handle a golf-club; by the riverside they sit down and tell you of the salmon they caught before they caught rheumatic fever; birds only make them long for guns; music raises visions of the local cricket-match of long ago, enlivened by the local band; a picturesque estaminet, with little tables spread out under the vines, recalls bitter memories of ping-pong. One is sorry for them, but their conversation is not exhilarating. The man who has other interests in life beyond sport is apt to find their reminiscences monotonous; while to one another they do not care to talk. One gathers that they do not altogether believe one another.

The foreigner is taking kindly to our sports; one hopes he will be forewarned by our example and not overdo the thing. At present, one is bound to admit, he shows no sign of taking sport too seriously. Football is gaining favour more and more throughout Europe. But yet the Frenchman has not got it out of his head that the *coup* to practise is kicking the ball high into the air and catching it upon his head. He would rather catch the ball upon his head than score a goal. If he can manœuvre the ball away into a corner, kick it up into the air twice running, and each time catch it on his head, he does not seem to care what happens after that. Anybody can have the ball; he has had his game and is happy.

They talk of introducing cricket into Belgium; I shall certainly try to be present at the opening game. I am afraid that, until he learns from experience, the Belgian fielder will stop cricket balls with his head. That the head is the proper thing with which to play ball appears to be in his blood. My head is round, he argues, and hard, just like the ball itself; what part of the human frame more fit and proper with which to meet and stop a ball.

Golf has not yet caught on, but tennis is firmly established from St. Petersburg to Bordeaux. The German, with the thoroughness characteristic of him, is working hard. University professors, stout majors, rising early in the morning, hire boys and practise back-handers and half-volleys. But to the Frenchman, as yet, it is a game. He plays it in a happy, merry fashion, that is shocking to English eyes.

Your partner's service rather astonishes you. An occasional yard or so beyond the line happens to anyone, but this man's object appears to be to break windows. You feel you really must remonstrate, when the joyous laughter and tumultuous applause of the spectators explain the puzzle to you. He has not been trying to serve; he has been trying to hit a man in the next court who is stooping down to tie up his shoe-lace. With his last ball he has succeeded. He has hit the man in the small of the back, and has bowled him over. The unanimous opinion of the surrounding critics is that the ball could not possibly have been better placed. A Doherty has never won greater applause from the crowd. Even the man who has been hit appears pleased; it shows what a Frenchman can do when he does take up a game.

But French honour demands revenge. He forgets his shoe, he forgets his game. He gathers together all the balls that he can find; his balls, your balls, anybody's balls that happen to be handy. And then commences the return match. At this point it is best to crouch down under shelter of the net. Most of the players round about adopt this plan; the more timid make for the club-house, and, finding themselves there, order coffee and light up cigarettes. After a while both players appear to be satisfied. The other players then gather round to claim their balls. This makes a good game by itself. The object is to get as many balls as you can, your own and other people's – for preference other people's – and run off with them round the courts, followed by whooping claimants.

In the course of half-an-hour or so, when everybody is dead beat, the game – the original game – is resumed. You demand the score; your partner promptly says it is "forty-fifteen." Both your opponents rush up to the net, and apparently there is going to be a duel. It is only a friendly altercation; they very much doubt its being "forty-fifteen." "Fifteen-forty" they could believe; they suggest it as a compromise. The discussion is concluded by calling it deuce. As it is rare for a game to proceed without some such incident occurring in the middle of it, the score generally is deuce. This avoids heart-burning; nobody wins a set and nobody loses. The one game generally suffices for the afternoon.

To the earnest player, it is also confusing to miss your partner occasionally – to turn round and find that he is talking to a man. Nobody but yourself takes the slightest objection to his absence. The other side appear to regard it as a good opportunity to score. Five minutes later he resumes the game. His friend comes with him, also the dog of his friend. The dog is welcomed with enthusiasm; all balls are returned to the dog. Until the dog is tired you do not get a look in. But all this will no doubt soon be changed. There are some excellent French and Belgian players; from them their compatriots will gradually learn higher ideals. The Frenchman is young in the game. As the right conception of the game grows upon him, he will also learn to keep the balls lower.

I suppose it is the continental sky. It is so blue, so beautiful; it naturally attracts one. Anyhow, the fact remains that most tennis players on the Continent, whether English or foreign, have a tendency to aim the ball direct at Heaven. At an English club in Switzerland there existed in my days a young Englishman who was really a wonderful player. To get the ball past him was almost an impossibility. It was his return that was weak. He only had one stroke; the ball went a hundred feet or so into the air and descended in his opponent's court. The other man would stand watching it, a little speck in the Heavens, growing gradually bigger and bigger as it neared the earth. Newcomers would chatter to him, thinking he had detected a balloon or an eagle. He would wave them aside, explain to them that he would talk to them later, after the arrival of the ball. It would fall with a thud at his feet, rise another twenty yards or so and again descend. When it was at the proper height he would hit it back over the net, and the next moment it would be mounting the sky again. At tournaments I have seen that young man, with tears in his eyes, pleading to be given an umpire. Every umpire had fled. They hid behind trees, borrowed silk hats and umbrellas and pretended they were visitors – any device, however mean, to avoid the task of umpiring for that young man. Provided his opponent did not go to sleep or get cramp, one game might last all day. Anyone could return his balls; but, as I have said, to get a ball past him was almost an impossibility. He invariably won; the other man, after an hour or so, would get mad and try to lose. It was his only chance of dinner.

It is a pretty sight, generally speaking, a tennis ground abroad. The women pay more attention to their costumes than do our lady players. The men are usually in spotless white. The ground is often charmingly situated, the club-house picturesque; there is always laughter and merriment. The play may not be so good to watch, but the picture is delightful. I accompanied a man a little while ago to his club on the outskirts of Brussels. The ground was bordered by a wood on one side, and surrounded on the other three by *petites fermes*– allotments, as we should call them in England, worked by the peasants themselves.

It was a glorious spring afternoon. The courts were crowded. The red earth and the green grass formed a background against which the women, in their new Parisian toilets, under their bright parasols, stood out like wondrous bouquets of moving flowers. The whole atmosphere was a delightful mingling of idle gaiety, flirtation, and graceful sensuousness. A modern Watteau would have seized upon the scene with avidity.

Just beyond – separated by the almost invisible wire fencing – a group of peasants were working in the field. An old woman and a young girl, with ropes about their shoulders, were drawing a harrow, guided by a withered old scarecrow of a man. They paused for a moment at the wire fencing, and looked through. It was an odd contrast; the two worlds divided by that wire fencing – so slight, almost invisible. The girl swept the sweat from her face with her hand; the woman pushed back her grey locks underneath the handkerchief knotted about her head; the old man straightened himself with some difficulty. So they stood, for perhaps a minute, gazing with quiet, passionless faces through that slight fencing, that a push from their work-hardened hands might have levelled.

Was there any thought, I wonder, passing through their brains? The young girl – she was a handsome creature in spite of her disfiguring garments. The woman – it was a wonderfully fine face: clear, calm eyes, deep-set under a square broad brow. The withered old scarecrow – ever sowing the seed in the spring of the fruit that others shall eat.

The old man bent again over the guiding ropes: gave the word. The team moved forward up the hill. It is Anatole France, I think, who says: Society is based upon the patience of the poor.

ARE EARLY MARRIAGES A MISTAKE?

I am chary nowadays of offering counsel in connection with subjects concerning which I am not and cannot be an authority. Long ago I once took upon myself to write a paper about babies. It did not aim to be a textbook on the subject. It did not even claim to exhaust the topic. I was willing that others, coming after me, should continue the argument – that is if, upon reflection, they were still of opinion there was anything more to be said. I was pleased with the article. I went out of my way to obtain an early copy of the magazine in which it appeared, on purpose to show it to a lady friend of mine. She was the possessor of one or two babies of her own, specimens in no way remarkable, though she herself, as was natural enough, did her best to boom them. I thought it might be helpful to her: the views and observations, not of a rival fancier, who would be prejudiced, but of an intelligent amateur. I put the magazine into her hands, opened at the proper place.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.