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CHAMBERS'S EDINBURGH JOURNAL, NO.306

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Various
Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, No.306 / New Series, Saturday, November 10, 1849

APPEARANCES

It is considered a sound rule not to sacrifice reality for appearances. To be good is held as better than only to seem good. Appearances, in as far as they may serve, and often do serve, as a means of cloaking some evil reality, are not, upon the whole, in good esteem among mankind. It is a word seldom mentioned without some expression of contempt or reprobation. Yet it may be questioned if we could, in this world, quite dispense with appearances.

To lead a life free of gross improprieties is undoubtedly the first requisite. If, however, while doing this, we allow much of our conduct to be interpretable into something opposite, is the result a matter of indifference to society? The thoughtless lady who flirts, or, as the common phrase is, allows herself latitudes, and who is yet studious to be substantially correct, answers, Yes; or perhaps she goes no farther than to say, Being in my own mind conscious of perfect rectitude, I have nothing to say to society on the subject, and it has no title to interfere, so long as I commit no actual transgression. This is specious, and seems to exclude reply. Most people give way to its force, yet do not act or speak as if they felt it to be quite right. It is wrong in this way: such conduct tends to become a screen to actual error; for if the virtuous appear to act exactly as the vicious do, how can we know where vice exists? It is our duty even to appear pure and irreproachable, because, when all that are pure present only the symptoms of purity in their external behaviour, it is the more difficult for the erring to conceal their guilt. They are forced into hypocrisy, which is not merely a homage to virtue, but a means of recruiting her ranks from the bands of vice, seeing that there is an additional pain and trouble in being wicked. All hypocrites would be, or have the advantages attendant on being, what they pretend to be. Can we doubt that, under a system of perfect freedom, they would be something worse than they are?

It thus appears that there is a philosophy in those little decorums of society which minds of a bold and sprightly character are so apt to deride, and which many persons, without the least ill intention, are so often seen to disregard. Every great cause must have its banner. Under every banner there will be a few rogues and cowards. But how much worse would it be with an army to have no ensign at all? It might then have the whole force of the enemy mingling in its ranks, and unresistedly hewing it in pieces.

When we hear of people keeping up appearances, we usually either condemn or laugh. Very often the condemnation or the ridicule is just, but not always so. There is much to object to in endeavours to attain or keep up a style of living different from that which is suitable to our actual means or our actual place in society. Let this error be abandoned to the unsparing satire of those who delight in exposing human weakness and frailty. But all keeping up of appearances is not of this nature. A family is often invested with a rank which its income will scarcely support in proper style, yet which it must support, or forfeit that rank altogether. Even in particular professions there is this hard necessity. The style is part of the very profession itself, something without which it cannot be practised. There is also such a thing as a decline of worldly prosperity, where to appear poor would be to become so even more rapidly than is strictly unavoidable. In such cases, if a family does not basely, by incurring debt, throw the actual suffering upon others – if it only pinches itself at one time, that it may make a decent show at another – if it only spares in its own grosser necessaries, that it may appear on a footing of equality with those of its own nominal social rank, or escape the pity which it is heavenly to give, but bitter to receive, there surely is no offence committed. I must own

I never could exactly see grounds for the mirth which prosperous citizens will sometimes indulge in regarding the 'appearances' of the struggling professional man, or the fallen-off family of rank. Such efforts, seeing that they involve much self-denial, that they tend to what is elegant rather than to what is gross, to what is elevated rather than to what is low, seem to me more creditable than otherwise. In our external life, observances become habits, and habits become principles. We all of us live not merely for and in ourselves, but partly for and in others. To be threatened with a fall from our sphere or special field of life, is to anticipate one of the greatest of evils, a sort of half death. It is not wonderful that men and women should make such a struggle to avoid it. But in fact efforts of this kind are connected with some of the best properties of our nature. The father eager to give his family the benefits of his own rank – the children willing to submit to any sacrifice, rather than see their parents lowered in the eyes of their equals: the whole resolvable into that sense of decency and sensibility to public esteem, without which this social scene would be a howling wilderness. No, there is surely no proper subject of merriment or of reprobation in these things.

There are in this empire two kinds of cities and towns – those which are passing through a career of mercantile prosperity, and those which rest at one point of prosperity, or are perhaps slowly falling off. It is not uncommon to hear the denizens of the parvenu town indulging in mirth at the expense of the meagre and ill-supported gentility which they observe in their ancient neighbour. Perhaps this neighbour has only a cathedral, or the county courts, to look to as a source of income: it keeps up a brave spirit, but cannot give anything better than tea-drinkings. Its better class are formal and refined in their manners, and even its poor have a clean delicate air about them, dressing much better than they eat or drink. All this is matter of mirth to the unthinking members of the more thriving community, who feel that, if they are less refined, they have at least more of the substantialities of life at their command. It seems to be a great prize to them that the genteel town is only a town of 'appearances.' But is there in this any true ground for so much self-congratulating merriment? I will admit there is, when it is established that the material is superior to the spiritual – that gross, full-feeding habits are more laudable than a taste for neat apparel – that a profuse, and often ostentatious expenditure, unregulated by taste, is better than a tasteful moderate expenditure, in which a sacrifice of immediate appetites is made for the sake of some ultimate gratification in the esteem of our fellow-creatures. It is a point of ambition with a Scottish artisan to have a suit of superfine black clothes in which to go to church and attend funerals. It may be said that this is keeping up an appearance beyond his station; but if he only saves for this appearance what a less intellectual operative of some other country would spend on excesses in meat and drink, enjoyed out of sight, is he not rather to be admired than condemned? I have known something of country towns, where there is considerable poverty within doors and in reality, while at the same time the bulk of the population make a principle of appearing as well dressed as possible; and my feeling on the subject is, that to laugh at such things is to laugh at virtue itself. The whole moral being of the individual anchors perhaps in some frail remains of well-saved clothes, or in the possession of some tolerable house handed down from some more comfortable ancestor. Take away this poor fiction from them, and their self-respect is diminished. They feel that they are regarded as falling into a lower category, and into that lower category they fall accordingly. No one, having a just sense of human frailty, would wantonly remove, or wish removed, even such slight edifications as these, but, on the contrary, rejoice to see them carefully maintained.

To sum up – It will always be proper to exercise the greatest care in discriminating between what is good and what is bad in appearances. Their being necessary to the support of morality, will not make them more amiable in those who lack the reality of goodness. Their being respectable in persons to whom loss of external grade or the failure to support it is social death, will not justify the ambitious citizen in forfeiting the real comfort of his family in an effort to live in the manner of those who possess better means. But, after the possibility of such abuses is admitted, and the fact itself deprecated, we must still keep in view that one of the essentials of a good life is a regard to Appearances.

R. C.

TAFFY LEWIN'S GREENERIE

Though nearly threescore years have intervened, the remembrance is still fresh on my memory of a certain spot which excelled all others I have since looked upon in its bright emerald hue and verdant freshness. It was on the outskirts of a village, which was only redeemed from positive ugliness by most of its tenements being ancient, though stretching away in a long straight line, and without either water or trees to vary the monotonous aspect of the turnpike-road. Turning abruptly from this road into a narrow lane, seemingly never-ending, and sloping gently downwards, a pleasing surprise was afforded on emerging into a deep valley, where the interminable winding of many sparkling tiny rivulets kept up a continual murmur, enchanting to listen to on a hot summer's day. Here were many fine old walnut-trees also, beneath whose thick-spreading boughs the rays of a burning sun never penetrated. Innumerable rows of osier-willows were planted on the banks, used in the art of basket-making, the osiers being of the finest and whitest kind, while everywhere and all around extended beds of watercresses. Yet it was not altogether the streamlets or the beautiful trees which made this spot so peculiarly refreshing: nowhere did grass appear so rich and green as in this quiet valley; it looked always as if it had just rained, the earth sending up the delicious perfume, and the thrush singing meanwhile, as it does after a shower in summer weather. Yet was there nothing indicative of damp or marsh land; all was healthy and hilarious-looking, and no plants throve here indigenous to unhealthy soils. Narrow planks of rough wood were thrown across the bright waters, which had to be crossed many times before reaching the dwelling-place of Taffy Lewin, the presiding genius of the place. This dwelling-place was a thatched cottage, containing three rooms; and Taffy herself, when I first saw her, almost realised my idea of the superannuated or dowager-queen of the fairies: she was then seventy years of age, and one of the least specimens of perfectly-formed humanity that I have ever beheld. So agile and quick was she in all her movements, that a nervous person would have been frequently startled; while her little, black, bead-like eyes sparkled in a most unearthly manner when her ire was aroused. She always wore a green skirt and a white calico jacket, her gray hair being tucked back beneath her mob-cap: she was, in short, the prettiest little old fairy it is possible to imagine; and as neat, clean, and bright-looking in her exterior, as if an enchanter's wand had just conjured her up front amid the crystal streams and watercress beds.

'And so it is from *hence* the fine watercresses come that I have enjoyed so much each morning at breakfast?' said I to the friend who accompanied me on my first introduction to Springhead, for so the valley was named.

'Yes,' she answered; 'and Taffy Lewin is the sole proprietress and gatherer of the cresses, for which she finds a ready sale in the immediate neighbourhood, her musical but clear and piercing cry of "Watercress fresh gathered – fine cress," being as well recognised, and duly attended to, as the chimes of our venerable church clock.'

'And has the old dame no other means of support?' quoth I; for the glimpse I had obtained of the interior of the cottage in the midst of this 'greenerie' certainly hinted that the trade of gathering this simple root was a most lucrative one; not only order and neatness, but comfort apparently reigning within.

'She disposes of the produce of these fine walnut-trees,' answered my friend; 'and she has also a companion residing with her, who manufactures the most beautiful baskets from these delicate osiers, which always fetch a high price. Taffy pays a very low rent to the gentleman who owns this valley and the adjacent lands; and excepting, I believe, a small sum in the savings' bank, to which she only resorts on emergencies, I do not know that she has any other means of support either for herself or her companion. Her story is a singular one, and I think you would like to hear it after we have made our purchases of baskets from poor Miss Clari.'

Miss Clari, as she was called, was a middle-aged female of plain appearance; and my interest and pity were excited on observing, from her lustreless eyes, that she was an imbecile. She was, however, animated with the spirit of industry. Her long and thin fingers rapidly and dexterously plied their task: she took no notice of *us*, but continued chanting in a low sad voice the words of a quaint French ditty. When Taffy approached her, she looked up and smiled: such a smile it was; I have never forgotten it.

'We have only these two baskets left, ladies,' said Taffy Lewin; 'for Miss Clari cannot make them fast enough for the sale they have; and yet, poor dear soul! she never ceases, save when she sleeps, for her fingers go on even when she is eating.'

'And are you not afraid that such close application may injure her health?' said I.

'La, miss, try and take it from her, and see how she wanders about with the tears silently coursing down her cheeks, and her fingers at work all the same. Bless her dear heart! if it *hurt* her, Taffy Lewin wouldn't let her do it.'

'Is she your daughter, Taffy?' inquired I.

'*My* daughter!' cried the little dame, her black beads twinkling ominously. 'No, she is no daughter of mine; there is gentle blood flows in *her* veins, and she was not *born* what you see her now. But take your baskets, ladies; Miss Clari is no gossip, as ye see, and I have work to do; for we eat not the bread of idleness here.'

I paid for the exquisitely-wrought baskets, and we quickly took our departure. On our homeward route my friend imparted the following particulars: —

When Taffy Lewin was a young woman, she had entered the service of a family named Drelincourt as assistant nursery-maid; but the head nurse soon after giving up her place, Taffy was promoted to it. This situation was by no means a pleasant one, as Taffy soon found out, the children being spoilt, and unruly to the greatest degree; but the wages were high, and Taffy was a friendless orphan, and so she thought it wisest to persevere. There were eight children, six girls and two boys. Mrs Drelincourt was in very delicate health, and the squire himself devoted to field-sports and boon companions. Drelincourt Hall was indeed nearly always full of company, the lady not being able to exist without the excitement of society suited to her taste any more than her husband could. Extravagance and recklessness were visible in all the domestic arrangements; and report said that not for many years longer was it possible to carry on this game.

A few years witnessed great changes, however, at the old hall: Mrs Drelincourt was gathered to her fathers, and five out of the eight children were carried off, a boy and two girls only being left; these three children seeming to concentrate in their own persons all the unmanageable propensities of their departed brothers and sisters.

Mr Drelincourt was stunned by the overwhelming force of the bereavement he had sustained, and he found his only present consolation and contentment in lavishing redoubled affection on his remaining children, and in gratifying their childish whims; much to their own detriment, poor things! He was not an ill-meaning, though a weak man, and idly disposed; avoiding trouble of all kinds, and determinately blind to anything that promised to occasion it; so he spoiled his children, and lived beyond his income, because it was pleasant to do so, and he hated to be bored! After establishing a gentleman at Drelincourt in the capacity of tutor to his son, Mr Drelincourt betook himself to the continent, whither his physician recommended him for change of scene, and more complete restoration of his shattered spirits.

Mr Drelincourt returned home, after some months' absence, with a second wife, having espoused a widow lady. This lady had one child by her first marriage, a little girl of ten or twelve years old, who accompanied her mother to the new home provided for them. This second union greatly displeased and surprised Mr Drelincourt's family and connections; for the lady, though suitable in point of years, and of a most gentle disposition, was altogether penniless; the small stipend she had enjoyed in right of her deceased husband ceasing on her marrying again. Thus Mr Drelincourt

had not only a wife added to his already heavy encumbrances, but a wife's child also on his hands; when, in truth, he had not wherewithal to make provision for his own two daughters. The Drelincourt estates were strictly entailed in the male line; but should Mr Drelincourt not leave a son to inherit the burthened landed property, it passed into stranger hands; and fearful was the contemplation of such a contingency with a helpless family of females, and nought but debts and disgrace for their inheritance!

However, the two Misses Drelincourt were brought up as if they were heiresses; and with dispositions full of pride and arrogance unchecked, it may easily be supposed that the introduction of a stepmother and a new sister was highly disagreeable; they having been told all the circumstances.

Clari St Eude, Mrs Drelincourt's daughter, was a plain, timid girl. Having been nurtured in retirement and comparative poverty, she shrank from the display of wealth around her now; but doubly she shrank from the cold demeanour of her new associates, who took no pains to conceal their contempt and aversion for the interloper. The Misses Drelincourt and their brother Henry found that open impertinence would not be tolerated, even by their doting father, when offered to his wife; but in venting all their jealousy and petty spleen on the poor unoffending Clari, who never resented and never complained, the case was far different. Ah, it is not in *open* warfare or unkindness that the heaviest cross is to be borne: it is hypocrisy and concealment we need dread.

This young girl, Clari St Eude, had little outwardly to prepossess the stranger in her favour: she was of a nervous temperament, easily alarmed, and chilled by an unkind word or look; but she had a clinging affectionate heart, and a forgiving temper. Her mother's position was a trying one, and Clari knew this, child as she was; nor would she for worlds have increased it by a hint that she had cause of sorrow or repining. Mrs Drelincourt struggled for peace, preserved and fostered it by every means in her power; nor was it probable that, even had she been otherwise disposed, Mr Drelincourt would have listened to or credited complaints against his own spoiled offspring.

Although Taffy Lewin's services as a nurse had for some time been dispensed with, she retained her comfortable chair in the commodious nursery, where the tiny woman got through oceans of needlework. Now, though Taffy certainly did feel a species of regard for Blanch and Laura Drelincourt, and also for Master Henry – nurslings spared out of a fine flock – she was by no means blind to their many defects and unamiable qualities, though she had long found all remonstrance useless. To this cheerful, sunny nursery of bygone days, often crept the pale and sickly stranger, Clari St Eude; hour after hour she would sit in silence by Taffy's side, until the kind-hearted little nurse began to pity, and then to love her, and finally won the confidence of the nervous, sensitive girl, who wept on her motherly bosom, and told her 'she wished mamma had not married the rich English gentleman, for she loved their Provence home better far than this.'

Clari inhabited a large sombre apartment all alone, and quite away from the rest of the family. This was a sore trial to the timid girl, though she never confessed her nameless fears, and struggled hard to master them; and as it was 'convenient' that she should occupy this chamber, her mother disliked to offer objections, nor was she, indeed, fully aware of her daughter's nervous sufferings. Clari tried to step sedately and composedly into that huge dark bed, with its black, hearse-like plumes, after she had extinguished her candle, and the darkness and silence were absolute: she tried to reason with herself, and to analyse the cause of her trepidation, for she was not aware that her physical debility accounted in a great degree for such mental weakness. Henry Drelincourt, with boyish mischief, had soon found out that 'Miss Wheyface' was a great coward; and it was one of his favourite amusements to play off practical jokes, and try to frighten her; while she, on her part, tried by all means in her power not to let the cruel boy know that he but too often succeeded.

At this juncture Mr and Mrs Drelincourt were absent from home for a few days, when, one morning, Miss Norman, the governess, who presided at the breakfast-table, remarked how singular it was that Miss St Eude, usually the first to make her appearance, had not yet come down. The brother and sisters looked at each other, and began to titter, and there was evidently a joke of some kind

amongst them, which they exceedingly enjoyed. But as their hilarity and free-masonry increased, so did Miss Norman's indefinable apprehensions – Clari not coming, and mischief mysteriously brewing!

At length Miss Norman sought Clari's chamber; but it was fastened, and no answer was returned to her repeated summons; but a low, moaning noise proceeded from within. After consulting Taffy Lewin, the door was burst open, and poor Clari was found in the agonies of a brain-fever. Taffy, from former experience, well knowing the imminent danger of the hapless sufferer, medical advice was summoned, and Mrs Drelincourt was instantly recalled. The doctors spoke of some sudden shock the nerves of their patient had sustained, but of what kind, or under what physical influence, it was impossible to say: the room was a dreary one, the young girl was of a highly-nervous, excitable temperament, and nervous disorders often took strange turns – frightful dreams, or ill-arranged reading, sometimes produced distressing effects. Clari St Eude recovered rapidly from the fever; but the brain was irretrievably injured. The light of reason was never re-illumined: all efforts were useless; there was hopeless darkness within.

But how came all this about? – what had happened? The chamber-door was well secured within, therefore no trick could have been played off, said Mr Drelincourt, even had any one had the mind to do so. It was very mysterious. Miss Norman had her suspicions, and she named them to Mr Drelincourt; but he dismissed her from his home and service: Taffy Lewin kept hers within her own bosom, and watched and waited. When the young Drelincourts were questioned, they answered with bravado, 'What! – are we invisible, or fairies, to fly through the keyhole?' It did indeed appear foolish to think that any one could have entered the chamber, it being well known that Miss St Eude always slept with her door locked; so that it was at length considered an extraordinary natural visitation, and poor Clari's affliction ceased to be the topic of conversation.

The Misses Drelincourt and their brother became much subdued after this sad event, and never willingly approached or saw the unfortunate girl. She lived now entirely with Taffy Lewin in the nursery. Taffy's compassion and devotion to her charge were without limits. Whatever Taffy Lewin's thoughts were on the subject of Miss St Eude's sudden attack, she never divulged them, even to Mrs Drelincourt. That exemplary lady's patience and resignation were fully shown forth by her piety and submission under this heavy and bitter affliction; for Clari was her only child, and a most beloved one. It was Taffy who suggested an occupation being found for Miss Clari, seconded by medical advice. It was indeed a long time before it took a useful or tangible form; but with perseverance, and kindness, and judicious treatment, at length there appeared hope that the incessantly-working fingers of the poor young lady might be moulded so as to benefit herself by creating amusement. At that time probably they had little thought of the future blessing this might prove to the bereaved.

Years passed on, and the old mouldering hall of the Drelincourts still reposed amid its dark pine-woods – unchanged without: within, all was not as it had been. The haughty and beautiful Blanch Drelincourt had married, without the knowledge of her friends, a person who supposed her to be the daughter of a wealthy man, and that a fortune must be forthcoming. He was undeceived too late, and found that he had to support a vain and penniless wife with an increasing family. Henry Drelincourt's education had been an expensive one, and his ruinous and profligate habits were more expensive still. It seemed clear to every one that the debts and disgrace so rapidly accumulating would leave to the heir of Drelincourt little more than the name. This young man came to pass a few weeks at his father's, to recruit his health, which had been shattered by a course of dissipation and recklessness. His sister Laura was now his only companion; and frivolous and unamiable as Laura Drelincourt was, she possessed one redeeming point, rendering her less selfish and domineering; and this was, a devoted affection for her brother.

She was never wearied of tending and studying his whims and caprices, which were not a few; and when an alarming infectious fever made its appearance in the village, and from thence spread to the hall – her brother and father being simultaneously attacked – Laura fearlessly devoted herself to the duties required in her brother's sick chamber; Mrs Drelincourt's whole time and attention being

taken up with her husband. Mr Drelincourt fell the first victim to the ravages of the fearful epidemic, while death among the retainers was busy in several cases. Henry was only pronounced out of danger when his sister Laura was attacked, and her life despaired of for many days. Mrs Drelincourt, now released from attendance on her husband, nursed the suffering Laura as if she had been her own child, and with the same feelings of maternal anxiety and solicitude. Laura's life was spared; and she seemed deeply penetrated with the unselfish and tender care she had experienced from her stepmother. There was a sense of shame and deep self-abasement in her manner, which seemed to say even more forcibly than the circumstances demanded – 'I have done you wrong; you are heaping coals of fire on my head!'

When the brother and sister were permitted to see each other again, the fatal truth flashed across Laura's mind for the first time, that Henry, although spared from the violence of the fever, had received a mortal blow, from which he never would recover; his constitution, already prematurely broken, was sinking rapidly: it was too evident that he had not many weeks to live. Nor did Mrs Drelincourt endeavour to raise false hopes in the sister's bosom, but rather to strengthen and enable her to bear the inevitable doom approaching. She supported, she tended and fostered, the dying man with Christian love and motherly compassion; and he writhed in agony beneath her kindness – the secret weighing on his mind being evidently unsupportable, while he, too, murmured, 'This is indeed heaping coals of fire on my head.'

It was after a long private conference between the brother and sister, wherein recent agitation had left the invalid more weakened than usual, that Henry, faintly requesting his gentle nurse to come beside him, murmured, 'Mother' – it was the first time he had ever called her so – 'I wish you to bring poor Clari here; I wish to see her.' Clari – almost forgotten during the late scenes of sorrow enacting in the hall – left wholly to Taffy's care, had entirely escaped contagion; and in the quiet distant nursery plied her simple amusement of weaving osiers, by degrees promising to become an expert basket-manufacturer. Clari came with her afflicted mother to Henry Drelincourt's side; and with her pale face, and vacant smile, and expressionless eyes, gazed on the dying man, taking up one of his thin wasted hands, and twining the fingers round her own, muttering, 'Oh, pretty – pretty!'

Henry, in his turn, gazed on the hapless girl with a prolonged and agonized look: the big round tears coursed down his sunken cheeks – blessed tears! – as he turned towards Mrs Drelincourt, and with clasped hands and streaming eye ejaculated, 'Can you forgive me?' She seemed not to understand his meaning, and returned an inquiring and astonished look, evidently thinking, poor lady, that her patient was light-headed.

'Do you not understand me? *Look at her: I did it!*' he added in hollow whispers, sinking back pale and exhausted. The truth now for the first time flashed on the unhappy mother's mind; speech was denied her; and she could only fold her child in her arms, and again and again embrace her with low, pitying moans. But the poor girl had caught the sound of Henry's words, '*forgive*;' and with smiles disengaging herself from her mother's arms, she knelt down beside him; and passing her long slender fingers caressingly over his wan face, she looked up at her mother, and repeated gently, '*Forgive – mother – forgive!*'

Before another day had flown, Henry Drelincourt was no more: he died in his sister Laura's arms, with one of his hands clasped in his stepmother's. He had heard her words of forgiveness: and there was another present who tremblingly besought pardon too – and unfolded a tale which Henry had not power to do – and this was the weeping Laura, from whom Mrs Drelincourt heard the following sad confession of heedless, unprincipled folly: —

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