

liver saw the Brobdingnag ladies. It is too small to see them in their entirety; a mole or a wart absorbs all its vision.

Have Mark Twain's literary qualities, apart altogether from his humour, been recognised in literary circles as they ought to be? 'Huck Finn' would be a great work were there not a laugh in it from cover to cover. Among the Indians and some other savage tribes the fact that a member of the community has lost one of his senses makes greatly to his advantage; he is regarded altogether as a superior person. So among a school of Anglo-Saxon readers, it is necessary to a man, if he would gain literary credit, that he should lack the sense of humour. One or two curious modern examples occur to me, of literary success secured chiefly by this failing.

All these authors are my favourites; but such Catholic taste is held now—always to be no taste. One is told that if one loves Shakspeare one must of necessity hate Ibsen; that one cannot appreciate Wagner and tolerate Beethoven; that if we admit any merit in Dore we are incapable of understanding Whistler. How can I say which is my favourite novel? I can only ask myself which lives clearest in my memory, which is the book I run to more often than to another, in that pleasant half hour before the dinner bell, when, with all apologies to good Mr Smiles, it is useless to think of work.

I find on examination that my 'David Copperfield' is more dilapidated than any other novel upon my shelves. As I turn its dog-eared pages, reading the familiar head-lines: 'Mr Micawber in Difficulties,' 'Mr Micawber in Prison,' 'I fall in Love with Dora,' 'Mr Barkis goes out with the tide,' 'My Child Wife,' 'Traddles in a nest of roses'—pages of my own life recur to me, so many of my sorrows, so many of my joys, are woven in my mind with this chapter or the other. That day—how well I remember it! I read of David's wooing, but Dora's death: I was careful to skip. Poor, pretty Mrs Copperfield at the gate, holding up her baby in her arms, is always associated in my memory with a child's cry, long listened for. I found the book, face downwards on a chair, weeks afterwards, not moved from where I had hastily laid it.

Old friends, all of you, how many times have I not slipped away from my worries into your pleasant com-

pany! Peggotty, you dear old soul, the sight of your kind eyes is so good to me. Our mutual friend, Mr Charles Dickens, is prone, we know, just ever so slightly, to gush. The friends he introduces to one are so very perfect. Good fellow that he is, he can see no flaw in those he loves, but you, dear lady, if you will permit me to call you by a name much abused, he has drawn in true colours. I know you well, with your big heart, your quick temper, your homely, human ways of thought. You yourself will never guess your worth—how much the world is better for such as you! You think of yourself as of a common-place person, useful only for the making of pastry, the darning of stockings, and if a man—not a young man, with only dim, half-opened eyes, but a man whom life had made keen to see the beauty that lies hidden behind plain faces—were to kneel and kiss your red, coarse hand, you would be much astonished. But he would be a wise man, Peggotty, knowing what things a man should take carelessly, and for what things he should thank God, who has fashioned fairness in many shapes.

Mr Wilkins Micawber, and you, most excellent of faithful wives, Mrs Emma Micawber, to you I also raise my hat. How often has the example of your philosophy saved me, when I, likewise, have suffered under the temporary pressure of pecuniary liabilities; when the sun of my prosperity, too, has sunk beneath the dark horizon of the world—in short, when I, also, have found myself in a tight corner! I have asked myself 'what would the Micawbers have done in my place. And I have answered myself. They would have sat down to a dish of lamb's fry, cooked and breaded by the deft hands of Emma, followed by a brew of punch, concocted by the beaming Wilkins, and have forgotten all their troubles for the time being. Whereupon, seeing first that sufficient small change was in my pocket I have entered the nearest restaurant and have treated myself to a repast of such sumptuousness as the aforesaid small change would go to, emerging from that restaurant stronger and more fit for battle. And lo, the sun of my prosperity has peeped at me from over the clouds with a sly wink, as if to say, 'Cheer up; I am only round the corner.'

Cheery, elastic Mr and Mrs Micawber, how would half the world face their fate but by the help of a kindly, shallow nature such as yours? I love to think that your sorrows can be drowned in nothing more harmful than a bowl of punch. Here's to you, Emma, and to you, Wilkins, and to the twins! May you and such child-like folk trip lightly over the stones upon your path! May something ever turn up for you, my dears! May the rain of life ever fall as April showers upon your simple bald head, Micawber!

And you, sweet Dora, let me confess I love you, though sensible friends deem you foolish. Ah, silly Dora, fashioned by wise mother nature, who knows that weakness and helplessness are as a talisman calling forth strength and tenderness in man, trouble yourself not unduly about the oysters and the underdone mutton, little woman. Good plain cooks at twenty pounds a year will see to these things for us. Your work is to teach us gentleness and kindness. Lay your foolish curls just here, child. It is from such as you we learn wisdom. Foolish wise folk sneer at you. Foolish wise folk would pull up the laughing lilies, the needless roses, from the garden, would plant in their places only useful, wholesome cabbage. But the gardener, knowing better, plants the silly, short lived flowers, foolish, wise folk asking for what purpose.

Gallant Traddles, of the strong heart and the curly hair; Sophy, dearest of girls; Betsey Trotwood, with your gentlemanly manners and your woman's heart, you have come to me in shabby rooms, making the dismal place seem bright. In dark hours your faces have looked out at me from the shadows, your kindly voices have cheered me.

Little Emily and Agnes, it may be my bad taste, but I cannot share my friend Dickens' enthusiasm for them. Dickens' good women are all too good for human nature's daily food. Esther Summerson, Florence Dombey, Little Nell—you have no faults to love you by.

Scott's women were likewise mere illuminated texts. Scott only drew

one live young heroine—Catherine Seton. His other women were merely the prizes the hero had to win in the end, like the sucking pig or the leg of mutton for which the yokel climbs the greasy pole. That Dickens could draw a woman to some likeness he proved by Bella Wilfer, and Estella in 'Great Expectations.' But real women have never been popular in fiction. Men readers prefer the false, and women readers object to the truth.

From an artistic point of view, 'David Copperfield' is undoubtedly Dickens best. Its humour is less boisterous; its pathos less highly coloured.

One of Leech's pictures represents a cabman calmly sleeping in the gutter. 'Oh, poor dear, he's ill,' says a tender hearted lady in the crowd. 'Ill!' retorts a male bystander indignantly. 'Ill!' 'Es 'ad too much of what I ain't 'ad enough of.'

Dickens suffered from too little of what some of us have too much of—criticism. His work met with too

little resistance to call forth his powers. Too often his pathos sinks to bathos, and this not from want of skill, but from want of care. It is difficult to believe that the popular writer who allowed his sentimentality—or rather the public's sentimentality—to run away with him in such scenes as the death of Paul Dombey and Little Nell was the artist who painted the death of Sydney Carton and of Barkis, 'the willing.' Barkis' death, next to the passing of Colonel Newcome, is, to my thinking, one of the most perfect pieces of pathos in English literature. The surroundings are so common-place, so simple. No very deep emotion is concerned. He is a common-place old man, clinging foolishly to a common-place box. His simple wife and the old boatman stand by, waiting calmly for the end. There is no straining after effect of any kind. One feels death enter, dignifying all things; and, touched by that hand, foolish old Barkis grows great.

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