

LETTER XIII.

DEAR SISTER:--

At the station house in London, we found Rev. Messrs. Binney and Sherman waiting for us with carriages. C. went with Mr. Sherman, and Mr. S. and I soon found ourselves in a charming retreat called Rose Cottage, in Walworth, about which I will tell you more anon. Mrs. B. received us with every attention which the most thoughtful hospitality could suggest.

S. and W., who had gone on before us, and taken lodgings very near, were there waiting to receive us. One of the first things S. said to me, after we got into our room, was, "O, H---, we are so glad you have come, for we are all going to the lord mayor's dinner to night, and you are invited."

"What!" said I, "the lord mayor of London, that I used to read about in Whittington and his Cat?" And immediately there came to my ears the sound of the old chime, which made so powerful an impression on my childish memory, wherein all the bells of London were represented as tolling.

"Turn again, Whittington,
Thrice lord mayor of London."

It is curious what an influence these old rhymes have on our associations.

S. went on to tell me that the party was the annual dinner given to the judges of England by the lord mayor, and that there we should see the whole English bar, and hosts of distingués besides. So, though I was tired, I hurried to dress in all the glee of meeting an adventure, as Mr. and Mrs. B. and the rest of the party were ready. Crack went the whip, round went the wheels, and away we drove.

We alighted at the Mansion House, and entered a large illuminated hall, supported by pillars. Chandeliers were glittering, servants with powdered heads and gold lace coats were hurrying to and fro in every direction, receiving company and announcing names. Do you want to know how announcing is done? Well, suppose a staircase, a hall, and two or three corridors, intervening between you and the drawing room. At all convenient distances on this route are stationed these grave, powdered-headed gentlemen, with their embroidered coats. You walk up to the first one, and tell him confidentially that you are Miss Smith. He calls to the man on the first landing, "Miss Smith." The man on the landing says to the man in the corridor, "Miss Smith." The man in the corridor shouts to the man at the drawing room door, "Miss Smith." And thus, following the sound of your name, you hear it for the last time shouted aloud, just before you enter the room.

We found a considerable throng, and I was glad to accept a seat which was offered me in the agreeable vicinity of the lady mayoress, so that I might see what would be interesting to me of the ceremonial.

The titles in law here, as in every thing else, are manifold; and the powdered-headed gentleman at the door pronounced them with an evident relish, which was joyous to hear--Mr. Attorney, Mr. Solicitor, and Mr. Sergeant; Lord Chief Baron, Lord Chief Justice, and Lord this, and Lord that, and Lord the other, more than I could possibly remember, as in they came dressed in black, with smallclothes and silk stockings, with swords by their sides, and little cocked hats under their arms, bowing gracefully before the lady mayoress.

I saw no big wigs, but some wore the hair tied behind with a small black silk bag attached to it. Some of the principal men were dressed in black velvet, which became them finely. Some had broad shirt frills of point or Mechlin lace, with wide ruffles of the same round their wrists.

Poor C., barbarian that he was, and utterly unaware of the priceless gentility of the thing, said to me, sotto voce, "How can men wear such dirty stuff? Why don't they wash it?" I expounded to him what an ignorant sinner he was, and that the dirt of ages was one of the surest indications of value. Wash point lace! it would be as bad as cleaning up the antiquary's study.

The ladies were in full dress, which here in England means always a

dress which exposes the neck and shoulders. This requirement seems to be universal, since ladies of all ages conform to it. It may, perhaps, account for this custom, to say that the bust of an English lady is seldom otherwise than fine, and develops a full outline at what we should call quite an advanced period of life.

A very dignified gentleman, dressed in black velvet, with a fine head, made his way through the throng, and sat down by me, introducing himself as Lord Chief Baron Pollock. He told me he had just been reading the legal part of the Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, and remarked especially on the opinion of Judge Ruffin, in the case of State v. Mann, as having made a deep impression on his mind. Of the character of the decision, considered as a legal and literary document, he spoke in terms of high admiration; said that nothing had ever given him so clear a view of the essential nature of slavery. We found that this document had produced the same impression on the minds of several others present. Mr. S. said that one or two distinguished legal gentlemen mentioned it to him in similar terms. The talent and force displayed in it, as well as the high spirit and scorn of dissimulation, appear to have created a strong interest in its author. It always seemed to me that there was a certain severe strength and grandeur about it which approached to the heroic. One or two said that they were glad such a man had retired from the practice of such a system of law.

But there was scarce a moment for conversation amid the whirl and eddy of so many presentations. Before the company had all assembled, the room

was a perfect jam of legal and literary notabilities. The dinner was announced between nine and ten o'clock. We were conducted into a splendid hall, where the tables were laid. Four long tables were set parallel with the length of the hall, and one on a raised platform across the upper end. In the midst of this sat the lord mayor and lady mayoress, on their right hand the judges, on their left the American minister, with other distinguished guests. I sat by a most agreeable and interesting young lady, who seemed to take pleasure in enlightening me on all those matters about which a stranger would naturally be inquisitive.

Directly opposite me was Mr. Dickens, whom I now beheld for the first time, and was surprised to see looking so young. Mr. Justice Talfourd, known as the author of *Ion*, was also there with his lady. She had a beautiful antique cast of head.

The lord mayor was simply dressed in black, without any other adornment than a massive gold chain.

I asked the lady if he had not robes of state. She replied, yes; but they were very heavy and cumbersome, and that he never wore them when he could, with any propriety, avoid it. It seems to me that this matter of outward parade and state is gradually losing its hold even here in England. As society becomes enlightened, men care less and less for mere shows, and are apt to neglect those outward forms which have neither beauty nor convenience on their side, such as judges' wigs and lord

mayors' robes.

As a general thing the company were more plainly dressed than I had expected. I am really glad that there is a movement being made to carry the doctrine of plain dress into our diplomatic representation. Even older nations are becoming tired of mere shows; and, certainly, the representatives of a republic ought not to begin to put on the finery which monarchies are beginning to cast off.

The present lord mayor is a member of the House of Commons--a most liberal-minded man; very simple, but pleasing in his appearance and address; one who seems to think more of essentials than of show.

He is a dissenter, being a member of Rev. Mr. Binney's church, a man warmly interested in the promotion of Sabbath schools, and every worthy and benevolent object.

The ceremonies of the dinner were long and weary, and, I thought, seemed to be more fully entered into by a flourishing official, who stood at the mayor's back, than by any other person present.

The business of toast-drinking is reduced to the nicest system. A regular official, called a toast master, stood behind the lord mayor with a paper, from which he read the toasts in their order. Every one, according to his several rank, pretensions, and station, must be toasted in his gradation; and every person toasted must have his name announced

by the official,--the larger dignitaries being proposed alone in their glory, while the smaller fry are read out by the dozen,--and to each toast somebody must get up and make a speech.

First, after the usual loyal toasts, the lord mayor proposed the health of the American minister, expressing himself in the warmest terms of friendship towards our country; to which Mr. Ingersoll responded very handsomely. Among the speakers I was particularly pleased with Lord Chief Baron Pollock, who, in the absence of Lord Chief Justice Campbell, was toasted as the highest representative of the legal profession. He spoke with great dignity, simplicity, and courtesy, taking occasion to pay very flattering compliments to the American legal profession, speaking particularly of Judge Story. The compliment gave me great pleasure, because it seemed a just and noble-minded appreciation, and not a mere civil fiction. We are always better pleased with appreciation than flattery, though perhaps he strained a point when he said, "Our brethren on the other side of the Atlantic, with whom we are now exchanging legal authorities, I fear largely surpass us in the production of philosophic and comprehensive forms."

Speaking of the two countries he said, "God forbid that, with a common language, with common laws which we are materially improving for the benefit of mankind, with one common literature, with one common religion, and above all with one common love of liberty, God forbid that any feeling should arise between the two countries but the desire to carry through the world these advantages."

Mr. Justice Talfourd proposed the literature of our two countries, under the head of "Anglo-Saxon Literature." He made allusion to the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mr. Dickens, speaking of both as having employed fiction as a means of awakening the attention of the respective countries to the condition of the oppressed and suffering classes. Mr. Talfourd appears to be in the prime of life, of a robust and somewhat florid habit. He is universally beloved for his nobleness of soul and generous interest in all that tends to promote the welfare of humanity, no less than for his classical and scholarly attainments.

Mr. Dickens replied to this toast in a graceful and playful strain. In the former part of the evening, in reply to a toast on the chancery department, Vice-Chancellor Wood, who spoke in the absence of the lord chancellor, made a sort of defence of the Court of Chancery, not distinctly alluding to Bleak House, but evidently not without reference to it. The amount of what he said was, that the court had received a great many more hard opinions than it merited; that they had been parsimoniously obliged to perform a great amount of business by a very inadequate number of judges; but that more recently the number of judges had been increased to seven, and there was reason to hope that all business brought before it would now be performed without unnecessary delay.

In the conclusion of Mr. Dickens's speech he alluded playfully to this item of intelligence; said he was exceedingly happy to hear it, as he

trusted now that a suit, in which he was greatly interested, would speedily come to an end. I heard a little by conversation between Mr. Dickens and a gentleman of the bar, who sat opposite me, in which the latter seemed to be reiterating the same assertions, and I understood him to say, that a case not extraordinarily complicated might be got through with in three months. Mr. Dickens said he was very happy to hear it; but I fancied there was a little shade of incredulity in his manner; however, the incident showed one thing, that is, that the chancery were not insensible to the representations of Dickens; but the whole tone of the thing was quite good-natured and agreeable. In this respect, I must say I think the English are quite remarkable. Every thing here meets the very freest handling; nothing is too sacred to be publicly shown up; but those who are exhibited appear to have too much good sense to recognize the force of the picture by getting angry. Mr. Dickens has gone on unmercifully exposing all sorts of weak places in the English fabric, public and private, yet nobody cries out upon him as the slanderer of his country. He serves up Lord Dedlocks to his heart's content, yet none of the nobility make wry faces about it; nobody is in a hurry to proclaim that he has recognized the picture, by getting into a passion at it. The contrast between the people of England and America, in this respect, is rather unfavorable to us, because they are by profession conservative, and we by profession radical.

For us to be annoyed when any of our institutions are commented upon, is in the highest degree absurd; it would do well enough for Naples, but it does not do for America.

There were some curious old customs observed at this dinner which interested me as peculiar. About the middle of the feast, the official who performed all the announcing made the declaration that the lord mayor and lady mayoress would pledge the guests in a loving cup. They then rose, and the official presented them with a massive gold cup, full of wine, in which they pledged the guests. It then passed down the table, and the guests rose, two and two, each tasting and presenting to the other. My fair informant told me that this was a custom which had come down from the most ancient time.

The banquet was enlivened at intervals by songs from professional singers, hired for the occasion. After the banquet was over, massive gold basins, filled with rose water, slid along down the table, into which the guests dipped their napkins--an improvement, I suppose, on the doctrine of finger glasses, or perhaps the primeval form of the custom.

We rose from table between eleven and twelve o'clock--that is, we ladies--and went into the drawing room, where I was presented to Mrs. Dickens and several other ladies. Mrs. Dickens is a good specimen of a truly English woman; tall, large, and well developed, with fine, healthy color, and an air of frankness, cheerfulness, and reliability. A friend whispered to me that she was as observing, and fond of humor, as her husband.

After a while the gentlemen came back to the drawing room, and I had a

few moments of very pleasant, friendly conversation with Mr. Dickens. They are both people that one could not know a little of without desiring to know more.

I had some conversation with the lady mayoress. She said she had been invited to meet me at Stafford House on Saturday, but should be unable to attend, as she had called a meeting on the same day of the city ladies, for considering the condition of milliners and dressmakers, and to form a society for their relief to act in conjunction with that of the west end.

After a little we began to talk of separating; the lord mayor to take his seat in the House of Commons, and the rest of the party to any other engagement that might be upon their list.

"Come, let us go to the House of Commons," said one of my friends, "and make a night of it." "With all my heart," replied I, "if I only had another body to go into to-morrow."

What a convenience in sight-seeing it would be if one could have a relay of bodies, as of clothes, and go from one into the other. But we, not used to the London style of turning night into day, are full weary already; so, good night.