

MRS. A. AND MRS. B.;

OR, WHAT SHE THINKS ABOUT IT.

Mrs. A. and Mrs. B. were next-door neighbors and intimate friends--that is to say, they took tea with each other very often, and, in confidential strains, discoursed of stockings and pocket handkerchiefs, of puddings and carpets, of cookery and domestic economy, through all its branches.

"I think, on the whole," said Mrs. A., with an air of profound reflection, "that gingerbread is the cheapest and healthiest cake one can make. I make a good deal of it, and let my children have as much as they want of it."

"I used to do so," said Mrs. B., "but I haven't had any made these two months."

"Ah! Why not?" said Mrs. A.

"Why, it is some trouble; and then, though it is cheap, it is cheaper not to have any; and, on the whole, the children are quite as well contented without it, and so we are fallen into the way of not having any."

"But one must keep some kind of cake in the house," said Mrs. A.

"So I have always heard, and thought, and practised," said Mrs. B.; "but really of late I have questioned the need of it."

The conversation gradually digressed from this point into various intricate speculations on domestic economy, and at last each lady went home to put her children to bed.

A fortnight after, the two ladies were again in conclave at Mrs. B.'s tea table, which was graced by some unusually nice gingerbread.

"I thought you had given up making gingerbread," said Mrs. A.; "you told me so a fortnight ago at my house."

"So I had," said Mrs. A.; "but since that conversation I have been making it again."

"Why so?"

"O, I thought that since you thought it economical enough, certainly I might; and that if you thought it necessary to keep some sort of cake in the closet, perhaps it was best I should."

Mrs. A. laughed.

"Well, now," said she, "I have not made any gingerbread, or cake of any kind, since that same conversation."

"Indeed?"

"No. I said to myself, If Mrs. B. thinks it will do to go without cake in the house, I suppose I might, as she says it is some additional expense and trouble; and so I gave it up."

Both ladies laughed, and you laugh, too, my dear lady reader; but have you never done the same thing? Have you never altered your dress, or your arrangements, or your housekeeping because somebody else was of a different way of thinking or managing--and may not that very somebody at the same time have been moved to make some change through a similar observation on you?

A large party is to be given by the young lads of N. to the young lassies of the same place; they are to drive out together to a picnic in the woods, and to come home by moonlight; the weather is damp and uncertain, the ground chill, and young people, as in all ages before the flood and since, not famous for the grace of prudence; for all which reasons, almost every mamma hesitates about her daughters' going--thinks it a very great pity the thing has been started.

"I really don't like this thing," says Mrs. G.; "it's not a kind of thing that I approve of, and if Mrs. X. was not going to let her

daughters go, I should set myself against it. How Mrs. X., who is so very nice in her notions, can sanction such a thing, I cannot see. I am really surprised at Mrs. X."

All this time, poor unconscious Mrs. X. is in a similar tribulation.

"This is a very disagreeable affair to me," she says. "I really have almost a mind to say that my girls shall not go; but Mrs. G.'s daughters are going, and Mrs. C.'s, and Mrs. W.'s, and of course it would be idle for me to oppose it. I should not like to cast any reflections on a course sanctioned by ladies of such prudence and discretion."

In the same manner Mrs. A., B., and C., and the good matrons through the alphabet generally, with doleful lamentations, each one consents to the thing that she allows not, and the affair proceeds swimmingly to the great satisfaction of the juveniles.

Now and then, it is true, some individual sort of body, who might be designated by the angular and decided letters K or L, says to her son or daughter, "No. I don't approve of the thing," and is deaf to the oft-urged, "Mrs. A., B., and C. do so."

"I have nothing to do with Mrs. A., B., and C.'s arrangements," says this impracticable Mrs. K. or L. "I only know what is best for my children, and they shall not go."

Again: Mrs. G. is going to give a party; and, now, shall she give wine, or not? Mrs. G. has heard an abundance of temperance speeches and appeals, heard the duties of ladies in the matter of sanctioning temperance movements aptly set forth, but "none of these things move her half so much as another consideration." She has heard that Mrs. D. introduced wine into her last soirée. Mrs. D's husband has been a leading orator of the temperance society, and Mrs. D. is no less a leading member in the circles of fashion. Now, Mrs. G.'s soul is in great perplexity. If she only could be sure that the report about Mrs. D. is authentic, why, then, of course the thing is settled; regret it as much as she may, she cannot get through her party without the wine; and so at last come the party and the wine. Mrs. D., who was incorrectly stated to have had the article at her last soirée, has it at her next one, and quotes discreet Mrs. G. as her precedent. Mrs. P. is greatly scandalized at this, because Mrs. G. is a member of the church, and Mr. D. a leading temperance orator; but since they will do it, it is not for her to be nice, and so she follows the fashion.

Mrs. N. comes home from church on Sunday, rolling up her eyes with various appearances of horror and surprise.

"Well! I am going to give up trying to restrain my girls from dressing extravagantly; it's of no use trying!--no use in the world."

"Why, mother, what's the matter?" exclaimed the girls aforesaid, delighted to hear such encouraging declarations.

"Why, didn't you see Mrs. K.'s daughters sitting in the pew before us with feathers in their bonnets? If Mrs. K. is coming out in this way, I shall give up. I shan't try any longer. I am going to get just what I want, and dress as much as I've a mind to. Girls, you may get those visites that you were looking at at Mr. B.'s store last week!"

The next Sunday, Mrs. K.'s girls in turn begin:--

"There, mamma, you are always lecturing us about economy, and all that, and wanting us to wear our old mantillas another winter, and there are Mrs. N.'s girls shining out in new visites."

Mamma looks sensible and judicious, and tells the girls they ought not to see what people are wearing in church on Sundays; but it becomes evident, before the week is through, that she has not forgotten the observation. She is anxiously pricing visites, and looking thoughtful as one on the eve of an important determination; and the next Sunday the girls appear in full splendor, with new visites, to the increasing horror of Mrs. N.

So goes the shuttlecock back and forward, kept up on both sides by most judicious hands.

In like manner, at a modern party, a circle of matrons sit in edifying conclave, and lament the degeneracy of the age.

"These parties that begin at nine o'clock and end at two or three in the morning are shameful things," says fat Mrs. Q., complacently fanning herself. (N. B. Mrs. Q. is plotting to have one the very next week, and has come just to see the fashions.)

"O, dreadful, dreadful!" exclaim, in one chorus, meek Mrs. M., and tall Mrs. F., and stiff Mrs. J.

"They are very unhealthy," says Mrs. F.

"They disturb all family order," says Mrs. J.

"They make one so sleepy the next day," says Mrs. M.

"They are very laborious to get up, and entirely useless," says Mrs. Q.; at the same time counting across the room the people that she shall invite next week.

Mrs. M. and Mrs. F. diverge into a most edifying strain of moral reflections on the improvement of time, the necessity of sobriety and moderation, the evils of conformity to the world, till one is tempted to feel that the tract society ought to have their remarks for general circulation, were one not damped by the certain knowledge that before the winter is out each of these ladies will give exactly such another party.

And, now, are all these respectable ladies hypocritical or insincere? By no means--they believe every word they say; but a sort of necessity is laid upon them--a spell; and before the breath of the multitude their individual resolution melts away as the frosty tracery melts from the window panes of a crowded room.

A great many do this habitually, resignedly, as a matter of course. Ask them what they think to be right and proper, and they will tell you sensibly, coherently, and quite to the point in one direction; ask them what they are going to do. Ah! that is quite another matter.

They are going to do what is generally done--what Mrs. A., B., and C. do. They have long since made over their conscience to the keeping of the public,--that is to say, of good society,--and are thus rid of a troublesome burden of responsibility.

Again, there are others who mean in general to have an opinion and will of their own; but, imperceptibly, as one and another take a course opposed to their own sense of right and propriety, their resolution quietly melts, and melts, till every individual outline of it is gone, and they do as others do.

Yet is this influence of one human being over another--in some sense, God-appointed--a necessary result of the human constitution. There is scarcely a human being that is not varied and swerved by it, as the



trembling needle is swerved by the approaching magnet. Oppose conflict with it, as one may at a distance, yet when it breathes on us through the breath, and shines on us through the eye of an associate, it possesses an invisible magnetic power. He who is not at all conscious of such impressibility can scarce be amiable or human. Nevertheless, one of the most important habits for the acquisition of a generous and noble character, is to learn to act individually, unswerved by the feelings and opinions of others. It may help us to do this, to reflect that the very person whose opinion we fear may be in equal dread of ours, and that the person to whom we are looking for a precedent may, at that very time, be looking to us.

In short, Mrs. A., if you think that you could spend your money more like a Christian than in laying it out on a fashionable party, go forward and do it, and twenty others, whose supposed opinion you fear, will be glad of your example for a precedent. And, Mrs. B., if you do think it would be better for your children to observe early hours, and form simple habits, than to dress and dance, and give and go to juvenile balls, carry out your opinion in practice, and many an anxious mother, who is of the same opinion, will quote your example as her shield and defence.

And for you, young ladies, let us pray you to reflect--individuality of character, maintained with womanly sweetness, is an irresistible grace and adornment. Have some principles of taste for yourself, and do not adopt every fashion of dress that is in vogue, whether it suits you or

not--whether it is becoming or not--but, without a startling variation from general form, let your dress show something of your own taste and opinions. Have some principles of right and wrong for yourself, and do not do every thing that every one else does, because every one else does it.

Nothing is more tedious than a circle of young ladies who have got by rote a certain set of phrases and opinions--all admiring in the same terms the same things, and detesting in like terms certain others--with anxious solicitude each dressing, thinking, and acting, one as much like another as is possible. A genuine original opinion, even though it were so heretical as to assert that Jenny Lind is a little lower than the angels, or that Shakspeare is rather dull reading, would be better than such a universal Dead Sea of acquiescence.

These remarks have borne reference to the female sex principally, because they are the dependent, the acquiescent sex--from nature, and habit, and position, most exposed to be swayed by opinion--and yet, too, in a certain very wide department they are the lawgivers and custom-makers of society. If, amid the multiplied schools, whose advertisements now throng our papers, purporting to teach girls every thing, both ancient and modern, high and low, from playing on the harp and working pincushions, up to civil engineering, surveying, and navigation, there were any which could teach them to be women--to have thoughts, opinions, and modes of action of their own--such a school would be worth having. If one half of the good purposes which are in the

hearts of the ladies of our nation were only acted out without fear of any body's opinion, we should certainly be a step nearer the millennium.