

raiment was of wrought gold. When I was a little boy I used to think she had a mahogany skeleton. However, she is gone, poor old lady, and at least she left me her furniture. Her ghost was torn in pieces after the sale--must have been. Even the old china went this way and that. I took what was perhaps a mean revenge of her for the innumerable black-holeings, bread-and-water dinners, summary chastisements, and impossible tasks she inflicted upon me for offences against her too solid possessions. You will see it at Woking. It is a light and graceful cross. It is a mere speck of white between the monstrous granite paperweights that oppress the dead on either side of her. Sometimes I am half sorry for that. When the end comes I shall not care to look her in the face--she will be so humiliated.

THE TROUBLE OF LIFE

I do not know whether this will awaken a sympathetic lassitude in, say, fifty per cent. of its readers, or whether my experience is unique and my testimony simply curious. At anyrate, it is as true as I can make it. Whether this is a mere mood, and a certain flagrant exhilaration my true attitude towards things, or this is my true attitude and the exuberant phase a lapse from it, I cannot say. Probably it does not matter. The thing is that I find life an extremely troublesome affair. I do not want

to make any railing accusations against life; it is--to my taste--neither very sad nor very horrible. At times it is distinctly amusing. Indeed, I know nothing in the same line that can quite compare with it. But there is a difference between general appreciation and uncritical acceptance. At times I find life a Bother.

The kind of thing that I object to is, as a good example, all the troublesome things one has to do every morning in getting up. There is washing. This is an age of unsolicited personal confidences, and I will frankly confess that if it were not for Euphemia I do not think I should wash at all. There is a vast amount of humbug about washing. Vulgar people not only profess a passion for the practice, but a physical horror of being unwashed. It is a sort of cant. I can understand a sponge bath being a novelty the first time and exhilarating the second and third. But day after day, week after week, month after month, and nothing to show at the end of it all! Then there is shaving. I have to get shaved because Euphemia hates me with a blue jowl, and I will admit I hate myself. Yet, if I were left alone, I do not think my personal taste would affect my decision; I will say that for myself. Either I hack about with a blunt razor--my razors are always blunt--until I am a kind of Whitechapel Horror, and with hair in tufts upon my chin like the top of a Bosjesman's head, or else I have to spend all the morning being dabbed about the face by a barber with damp hands. In either case it is a repulsive thing to have, eating into one's time when one might be living; and I have calculated that all the hair I have lost in this way, put end to end, would reach to Berlin. All that vital energy thrown

away! However, "Thorns and bristles shall it bring forth to thee." I suppose it is part of the primal curse, and I try and stand it like a man. But the thing is a bother all the same.

Then after shaving comes the hunt for the collar-stud. Of all idiotic inventions the modern collar is the worst. A man who has to write things for such readers as mine cannot think over-night of where he puts his collar-stud; he has to keep his mind at an altogether higher level. Consequently he walks about the bedroom, thinking hard, and dropping things about: here a vest and there a collar, and sowing a bitter harvest against the morning. Or he sits on the edge of the bed jerking his garments this way and that. "I shot a slipper in the air," as the poet sings, and in the morning it turns up in the most impossible quarters, and where you least expect it. And, talking of going to bed, before Euphemia took the responsibility over, I was always forgetting to wind my watch. But now that is one of the things she neglects.

Then, after getting up, there is breakfast. Autolycus of the Pall Mall Gazette may find heaven there, but I am differently constituted. There is, to begin with the essence of the offence--the stuff that has to be eaten somehow. Then there is the paper. Unless it is the face of a fashionable beauty, I know of nothing more absolutely uninteresting than a morning paper. You always expect to find something in it, and never do. It wastes half my morning sometimes, going over and over the thing, and trying to find out why they publish it. If I edited a daily I think I should do like my father does when he writes to me. "Things much the

same," he writes; "the usual fussing about the curate's red socks"--a long letter for him. The rest margin. And, by the bye, there are letters every morning at breakfast, too!

Now I do not grumble at letters. You can read them instead of getting on with your breakfast. They are entertaining in a way, and you can tear them up at the end, and in that respect at least they are better than people who come to see you. Usually, too, you need not make a reply. But sometimes Euphemia gets hold of some still untorn, and says in her dictatorial way that they have to be answered--insists--says I must. Yet she knows that nothing fills me with a livelier horror than having to answer letters. It paralyses me. I waste whole days sometimes mourning over the time that I shall have to throw away presently, answering some needless impertinence--requests for me to return books lent to me; reminders from the London Library that my subscription is overdue; proposals for me to renew my ticket at the stores--Euphemia's business really; invitations for me to go and be abashed before impertinent distinguished people: all kinds of bothering things.

And speaking of letters and invitations brings me round to friends. I dislike most people; in London they get in one's way in the street and fill up railway carriages, and in the country they stare at you--but I hate my friends. Yet Euphemia says I must "keep up" my friends. They would be all very well if they were really true friends and respected my feelings and left me alone, just to sit quiet. But they come wearing shiny clothes, and mop and mow at me and expect me to answer their

gibberings. Polite conversation always appears to me to be a wicked perversion of the blessed gift of speech, which, I take it, was given us to season our lives rather than to make them insipid. New friends are the worst in this respect. With old friends one is more at home; you give them something to eat or drink, or look at, or something--whatever they seem to want--and just turn round and go on smoking quietly. But every now and then Euphemia or Destiny inflicts a new human being upon me. I do not mean a baby, though the sentence has got that turn somehow, but an introduction; and the wretched thing, all angles and offence, keeps bobbing about me and discovering new ways of worrying me, trying, I believe, to find out what topics interest me, though the fact is no topics interest me. Once or twice, of course, I have met human beings I think I could have got on with very well, after a time; but in this mood, at least, I doubt if any human being is quite worth the bother of a new acquaintance.

These are just sample bothers--shaving, washing, answering letters, talking to people. I could specify hundreds more. Indeed, in my sadder moments, it seems to me life is all compact of bothers. There are the details of business--knowing the date approximately (an incessant anxiety) and the time of day. Then, having to buy things. Euphemia does most of this, it is true, but she draws the line at my boots and gloves and hosiery and tailoring. Then, doing up parcels and finding pieces of string or envelopes or stamps--which Euphemia might very well manage for me. Then, finding your way back after a quiet, thoughtful walk. Then, having to get matches for your pipe. I sometimes dream of a better

world, where pipe, pouch, and matches all keep together instead of being mutually negatory. But Euphemia is always putting everything into some hiding-hole or other, which she calls its "place." Trivial things in their way, you may say, yet each levying so much toll on my brain and nervous system, and demanding incessant vigilance and activity. I calculated once that I wasted a masterpiece upon these mountainous little things about every three months of my life. Can I help thinking of them, then, and asking why I suffer thus? And can I avoid seeing at last how it is they hang together?

For there is still one other bother, a kind of bother botherum, to tell of, though I hesitate at the telling. It brings this rabble herd of worries into line and makes them formidable; it is, so to speak, the Bother Commander-in-Chief. Well! Euphemia. I simply worship the ground she treads upon, mind, but at the same time the truth is the truth. Euphemia is a bother. She is a brave little woman, and helps me in every conceivable way. But I wish she would not. It is so obviously all her doing. She makes me get up of a morning--I would not stand as much from anybody else--and keeps a sharp eye on my chin and collar. If it were not for her I could sit about always with no collar or tie on in that old jacket she gave to the tramp, and just smoke and grow a beard and let all the bothers slide. I would never wash, never shave, never answer any letters, never go to see any friends, never do any work--except, perhaps, an insulting postcard to a publisher now and again. I would just sit about.

Sometimes I think this may be peculiar in me. At other times I fancy I am giving voice to the secret feeling of every member of my sex. I suspect, then, that we would all do as the noble savage does, take our things off and lie about comfortable, if only someone had the courage to begin. It is these women--all love and reverence to Euphemia notwithstanding--who make us work and bother us with Things. They keep us decent, and remind us we have a position to support. And really, after all, this is not my original discovery! There is the third chapter of Genesis, for instance. And then who has not read Carlyle's gloating over a certain historical suit of leather? It gives me a queer thrill of envy, that Quaker Fox and his suit of leather. Conceive it, if you can! One would never have to quail under the scrutiny of a tailor any more. Thoreau, too, come to think of it, was, by way of being a prophet, a pioneer in this Emancipation of Man from Bothery.

Then the silent gentry who brew our Chartreuse; what are they in retirement for? Looking back into history, with the glow of discovery in my eyes, I find records of wise men--everyone acknowledged they were wise men--who lived apart. In every age the same associate of solitude, silence, and wisdom. The holy hermits!... I grant it, they professed to flee wickedness and seek after righteousness, but now my impression is that they fled bothers. We all know they had an intense aversion to any savour of domesticity, and they never shaved, washed, dined, visited, had new clothes. Holiness, indeed! They were viveurs.... We have witnessed Religion without Theology, and why not an Unsectarian Thebaid? I sometimes fancy it needs only one brave man to begin.... If it were

not for the fuss Euphemia would make I certainly should. But I know she would come and worry me worse than St. Anthony was worried until I put them all on again, and that keeps me from the attempt.

I am curious whether mine is the common experience. I fancy, after all, I am only seeing in a clearer way, putting into modern phrase, so to speak, an observation old as the Pentateuch. And looking up I read upon a little almanac with which Euphemia has cheered my desk:--

"The world was sad" (sweet sadness!)

"The garden was a wild" (a picturesque wild)

"And man the hermit" (he made no complaint)

"Till the woman smiled."--CAMPBELL.

[And very shortly after he had, as you know, all that bother about the millinery.]