

"Half-past four, by Jove! I must be getting on. Well, Bagshot, ta-ta. One must talk, you know. I really hope you will be comfortable in your new rooms."

And so good-bye to Bagshot, staring in a puzzled way at his reviled and desecrated walls.

ON SOCIAL MUSIC

My poor uncle came to me the other evening in a most distressful state, broken down to common blasphemy. His ample front was rumpled with sorrow and his tie disorderly aslant. His hair had gone rough with his troubles. "The time I have had, George!" he panted. "Give me something to drink in the name of Holy Charity."

Since the Pall Mall Gazette took to reporting his little sayings about photographs and ornaments, ideals and fashions, he has been setting up as a conversationalist. He thinks he was designed by Providence to that end, and aids his destiny as much as he can by elaborately preparing remarks.

Yet this thing had happened. "They put," said my uncle, "a little chap

at the piano, and me at a very nice girl indeed as she looked; and the little chap began, and so did I. I said a prelude thing of mine, brand new and rather pretty."

He stopped. He turned to nerve himself with whisky.

"Well," I said, when the pause seemed sufficient; "what did she say?"

My uncle looked unspeakable things. Then in a whisper, bending towards me:

"She said----Sssh!"

He repeated it that I might grasp its full enormity, "Sssh!--so!"

"What is music," said my uncle, after a moody silence, "that reasonable people should listen to it? I had to listen to it myself, and it struck me. It was just a tune this little chap was trying to remember, and now he would come at it this way and now that. He never got it quite right, though he fumbled about it for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. And then two girls went, and one punished the piano while the other, with a wrist rather than an ear for music, drowned its cries with a violin. So it went on all the evening, and when I moved they all looked at me; I had been put on a nervous wicker chair, and I knew my shoes squeaked like a carnival of swine, and so I could not get away. And all the things that kept coming into my head,

George, the neat remarks and graceful sayings!

"You see, I look at it in this light. Music is merely background, and ought to be kept in its place. I am no enemy of music, George. The air in a room should be melodious, for the same reason that it should be faintly pleasing to the olfactory sense, and neither hot nor stuffy. Just as the walls should be delightfully coloured and softly lit, and the refreshments pleasant and at the moment of need. But surely we meet for human intercourse. When I go to see people I go to see the people--not to hear a hired boy play the piano. But these people plant a chevaux de frise of singers and performers upon instruments of music between themselves and me. They gag me with a few pennyworths of second-hand opera. There I was bursting to talk, and nice, intelligent-looking girls to talk to, and whenever I began to say something they said 'Sssh!' Tantalus in a drawing-room it was--the very Hades of hospitality.

"Surely some day we shall learn refinement in our entertaining. Your modern hostess issues her invitations and seems overcome with consternation at her gathering. 'What shall I do with all these people?' she seems to ask. So she dabs cakes upon them, piles coffee cups over them: 'Eat,' she says, 'and shut up!' and stifles their protests with a clamorous woman and a painful piano.

"No, of course I don't object to having music. But it is an accessory, not an object, in life. It is, after all, a physical comfort, a

pleasant vibration in one's ears. To make an object of it is sensuality. It is on all-fours with worshipping the wallpaper. Some wall-papers are very beautiful things nowadays, harmonious in form and colour, skilful in invention; but people do not expect you to sit down and admire wall-paper, or promise you 'wallpaper at eight.' Neither do they put an extinguisher over any girl who does not go with the wall-paper, or expect you to dress in neutral tint on account of it, and they are not hurt if you go away without seeming to see it. Gustatory harmony, too, is very delicious. Yet there is no hush during dinner; they do not insist upon a persistent gnawing in honour of the feast. But these musical people! their god is their piano. They set up an idol in their salon, and command all the world to bow down to it. They found a priestcraft of pianists, and an Inquisition of fiddlers. When I came away they were all crowded round a violin, the women especially. They could not have fussed more if it had been a baby. They stroked it and admired its figure. It had rather a fashionable figure, but the neck was too long...."

I began to suspect the cause of this bitterness.

"Yes. She was there. And while some of this piano was going on she looked at the ear of the man who was playing with a dreamy, tender look.... No. I couldn't get a word with her the whole evening."