

## On the Folly of Heeding Scandal.

The following paper was written by our late sister, Mrs. Fatima E. Cates (whose demise we so recently chronicled), and was read before a meeting of the members of the Liverpool Muslim Institute during the session of 1890. It has never been previously printed:—

So long as the race of men endures, the main occupation of the marvellous creatures after they have secured the means of subsistence will be to interest themselves in each other's business; and hence the true statements which we call "scandal" and the false ones which we call "slander" will always be scattered in plenty. A scandal may, of course, be false; but we use the word to signify any tale, true or false, which deals with the private or public conduct of any individual, and which represents that individual in a light the reverse of admirable. King Solomon and King David seem to have suffered bitterly at the hands of scandalmongers and slanderers, and they are equalled in bitterness only by the Patriarch Job; so the antiquity of scandal is incontestable.

Shakespeare says very soundly that the most stainless of men and women must not expect to escape calumny; and we have an uncomfortable notion that the view taken by the world's greatest and wisest is very like the truth. We cannot remember one man in history and one man in the world of to-day who has not been made a mark for scandal. Cardinal Newman approached the saintly ideal as nearly as man may, and yet even he was once accused of using his position in order to lead the minds of young men astray. The Cardinal was a terrible disputant, and he effectually disposed of the scandal, but still it had been uttered. We are all agreed on calling the late Prince Consort "Albert the Good," and yet there was a time when that high-hearted man was the object of a storm of calumny, and his position in this country was regarded by some really shrewd men as rather

precarious. We smile now at the reckless assaults which were made on the Prince; but people did not smile thirty-six years ago.

There are some modern men who enjoy scandal when it is directed against themselves, and actually invite it. They say, "I would rather have your spite than your pity," and they take the best possible means to secure the personal advertisement which reckless spite bestows on its object. These men generally manage to extract some personal profit from the keenest assaults made upon them, and they smile composedly while some unhappy enemy works himself into a perfect fury of earnestness. One celebrity was subjected to a long and most venomous series of assaults, and these were the deadliest ironies of a strong writer. The assailed person remained silent until the storm had abated, and then he sent round a paragraph which was widely printed. "It is not true that Mr. X. has paid any minor writer or writers to attack him." Only the forehead of brass could have endured the attack and remained unruffled.

So far as public men are concerned, we are used to hearing all kinds of violent accusations. A very prominent man's name may be printed a thousand times daily and dark charges made against him, yet if he remains perfectly quiet he takes no harm. If his private character be assailed, he is in peril, even though his offence may be trivial; but the very ecstasy of foul abuse does not alter his public position. Then there are the reformers—true and sham—who utter their convictions loudly. The sham should be denounced, but it always requires the keenest of eyes to distinguish truth from unreality, and hence we see men and women who are the very salt of the earth classed with charlatans and loaded with calumny. For the public character silence is the best retort, and it seems as if a steady, scornful refusal to answer any sort of accusation were far better than elaborate and logical defence. The cynical authors and dramatists sometimes profess great delight when their works are bitterly criticised; and they are certainly right in one

particular, for an uncompromising attack on a book is sure to send up the sale, thanks to frail human nature. If a play becomes the subject of acrid discussion, the theatre is crowded; and hence some thick-skinned people will take incredible pains to invite attack, and they rejoice when the critic squirts gall and wormwood on them.

All this is very curious, and perhaps entertaining, but it does not quite lie on the line of discussion which we want to follow. Most of those whom we address are not in need of fame or notoriety, and they are satisfied if they can pass through the world fulfilling duty honestly, feeling no might or overmastering emotions, and doing as little harm as possible while they pursue the even tenor of their way. Now, there are many of the good folk who fail to derive the highest pleasure from life, who fret themselves dismally only because they are eternally afraid of what other people may be saying about them. We have never fairly gone into this subject by more than casual hints, and it seems to me worth analysing from a few commonplace points of view. A large-minded, cool-tempered, clear-eyed man, who looks gently on the brothers of his race, and who knows his own weaknesses, cannot help being saddened by watching the uniform acrimony with which minds of low type are wont to criticise all the actions of others. All grades of society must be studied, and the observer must on no account allow temper to get the better of him. That calm and gentle mood which Marcus Antonius sought to make habitual among men is the only proper state of mind in which to approach the study of the feeble and the fallen or falling; it is also the only safeguard when spite and envy and bitterness come suddenly before the eyes in all their repulsive varieties.

Take this disposition to scandal in its lowest phases, and observe how certain poor girls will chatter about each other, in season or out of season. With what certainty an evil tale finds its way round to the person about whom it is told, and how much pain it causes! Well,

a good name is very precious to man or woman, just as good health is; but an individual who is extravagantly querulous about the preservation of health ends by becoming a public nuisance; while the person who is for ever shrieking causelessly over tiny grievances is as great a pest as the sham invalid.

A certain lordly indifference may be easily assumed by those who have nerve enough for it; but it is precisely the nerve that is oftenest wanting, and thus we have hundreds of harmless enough beings shivering over petty things which they imagine themselves to have done, and pettier things which they imagine other people to have said. We often have letters from sufferers who fancy that "every one is looking at them," and it is difficult to say what should be done to remove that odd self-consciousness. Then there are others to whom the importance of outside opinion assumes tragic and terrific dimensions, so that they have few placid hours of life.

There are accusations which may be brought by an innuendo against such men as ministers and schoolmasters, and others whose position is delicate; and then the scandal is a matter of life and death. If there is only the whisper, the hint, the chuckle, then the marked victim can do very little save wait until he has something definite to catch at. If he takes too rapid action, and effectually disconcerts the scandalmongers, still the slain rumour leaves something harmful behind it. But if any definite word can be surely traced to one talker, then the fiercest measures should be taken, if necessary, to deal out punishment. Some good men have allowed a certain timidity to influence them. They have said "What is the good of fighting with a sweep?" and their sensitive delicacy has forbidden them to hurt a being against whom any legitimate weapon should have been unsparingly used. Then the old half-true saying, "There is no smoke without fire," has been quoted for the millionth time, and a man who in all probability had done no wrong remains under a slur. If the slandered individual has a good case, then publicity of

the widest kind should be invited, or, rather, demanded, and the most defiant air should be deliberately assumed. A scandal of this vital sort is like an attempt to extort blackmail. Some silly and thin-skinned folk give way to the blackmailer to avoid trouble, and they thus hand themselves over to a cruel taskmaster, who shows no mercy; whereas, if they seized him on his first demand, and let him do his very worst, he would at once succumb like the cur that he is.

But our business is not with great scandals which blight lives and alter careers; we think rather of the petty tittle-tattle, which seems so trifling, and which causes such pain. Some grown men, strange to say, are absolutely miserable if they learn that some one has spoken disparagingly of them. But what on earth can a sneer or a piece of futile backbiting matter to any sane creature? Suppose, for example, that a man says he does not like you, that is a result of his peculiar temperament, and his dislike, however expressed, will hurt you no more than the breath of a summer breeze, so long as he is careful to keep outside the range of the law. It is the same with ordinary tittle-tattle. Women will come home from church in a perfect agony because they have seen that a whispered conversation was passing, and fancied that they must be the subjects of it. The consciousness of being slightly inferior with regard to dress will haunt a silly person like a sense of crime; an innocent look from a passer-by is taken for insolent scrutiny, a vacant smile on the face of some merry girl is set down as an exhibition of insolence, and the poor self-tormentor often enters her own house and visits an outbreak of petulant temper on her own people. There are minds to which the amount of a neighbour's butcher's bill transcends all questions of imperial importance; there are minds capable of being occupied for an hour or a day or a week by the thrilling fact that a lady has turned her last year's dress or has had an ancient sealskin done up. Then there are men of every rank—from the

club aristocrat to the labourer in the taproom—who must needs tattle negative harmless stuff. The club man says that Jones is making a fool of himself by giving dinners which half poison people; Bob in the pothouse complains with acrimony that the absent Jemmy is never willing to pay his share, though he is most alert when it comes to drinking. Then look at the poor furious girls whose conversation is made up of "I says" and "she says," with tags of repeated scoldings.

The male backbiter and the female are alike not worth considering, and we are barely able to form a picture of the kind of mind which is influenced one way or another by such talk, which is, as it were, the soiled thistledown of speech. None the less we own that souls of really fine temper are hurt grievously by the cackle of the meanest and most ignoble of human creatures. Take the case of a poor, struggling professional man, whose stipend is sorely taxed by the demands of charity. He has to live meanly; his own wife's thin jacket offers a chilly contrast to the lordly sealskin worn by the wife of his butcher; his own boots show an obtrusive patch, and the high-bred scholar sometimes is driven nearly distraught by the certain knowledge that the butcher, the baker, the churchwarden, the innkeeper, all discuss his poverty with malice, or, at least, with a careless contempt, which is worse still. The man cannot help the way in which he has been trained; vulgar gossip strikes him like a blow, and he is indeed to be pitied. But why should he not brace him up to indifference? Could he only rigidly force his own intellect to perceive that he is none the worse for all the babble of village or town he might be nearly happy; as it is, he passes sleepless nights in imagining what may possibly be said of him by the lowest of the low, and he scourges himself with remorse when he thinks of the straits to which he has brought his partner. There would be no harm done by a little airy heedlessness in this instance, and in such a way many an essentially noble soul might be rescued from self-torture.

Just one consideration must be pressed on reasonable readers at this juncture. We ask, "Do you not know that the very people who gabble spitefully concerning you are those who fawn most fulsomely on you when they meet you face to face?" Supposing that you suddenly enter a room where people have been talking about you, there is a something in the air, there is an indefinable and indescribable expression on the face of the talkers, and you know what has been passing. One of the gossips may sulk and look embarrassed, but the identical person who has most freely decried you is cordial, and even affectionate. Since that chatter is of a kind which is too small or too base to be repeated in your hearing, why notice it? In the North of England there is a delightful word used to describe the efforts of gossips; the scandal is called "clash," and the term is effective. To the low mind, miserable, personal gossip is an essential of contentment, and such talk is "clash"—a noise and nothing more. Women of the "clashing" sort are abhorred and avoided by all quiet and sensible people; they frame their little stories, they vent their little criticisms, and no more is to be said. If they take a genuine spite against a young girl, they may vary her life by some amount of small annoyance; but, if the girl has a will and nerve, she may not only neglect the gossips, but she may absolutely terrorise them into discretion. As to the thin, vain scandal which creeps into print, and perhaps hurts sensitive skins as if spurts of a biting acid had been thrown on them, it has its minute or its hour, and the man or woman who notices it should be put under control at once.

It is no pleasant task to us when we have to say something regarding the meanness of man's nature; but when we see that things unimportant are treated as important, that things which should be laughed at are allowed to give pain, we think it advisable to endeavour to employ a little clear common sense to defend sensitive persons from their own too amiable weakness.

## Trial of the Giaour Who Attempted to Kill H.I.M. the Shah.

Salsou, the Anarchist, who attempted to shoot His Imperial Majesty the Shah of Persia, was tried in the Seine Assize Court, on Saturday, 10th November, and was condemned to penal servitude for life. The case attracted but little attention from the public. The prisoner is an uninteresting type of the working-class revolutionist, twenty-four years of age, and although supposed to be an Anarchist of a milder kind than Ravachol, Vaillant, or Henry, he has a bad police record. He rarely frequented Anarchist meetings, but imbibed his theories about society from revolutionist books, pamphlets and newspapers.

His career, as summed up by the presiding judge, was of a chequered description. The man was born at Saint Affrique in the Aveyron, his parents being of the small farming class. He was educated in a religious school, and on leaving it was taken as an office boy by a notary, whose employment he left in order to learn how to make the cakes called *brioche*s. Tired of the monotony of his native place, Salsou went to Algeria to seek his fortune. There he became an Anarchist, and drew attention to himself in the confectionery establishment where he worked by cynically rejoicing over the assassination of President Carnot.

That event caused him to leave Algeria for Lyons, where he could find no employment, and he started to tramp to Paris. He was arrested by the gendarmes at Nemours as a dangerous vagabond and Anarchist, for the police of Algeria were in communication about him with their colleagues in France. After having spent some time in prison, Salsou joined the army, and found himself once more in Algeria. Strange to say, he was noted as a good soldier, and his superiors promoted him to the rank of corporal. On leaving the army the would-be murderer of the Shah again got into trouble with the police for having dangerously stabbed a drunken workman in Paris. Leaving prison after eight months' confinement,

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Salsou found work in Paris, and took a female companion, who, after his arrest for the attempt on the life of the Shah, gave the police full particulars as to his movements. He danced with joy, she said, when he heard of the assassination of the King of Italy, and remarked that he, too, was going to imitate the Anarchist regicides.

The first person whom he resolved to remove was M. Casimir-Perier, ex-President of the Republic, because, as he told the presiding judge on Saturday, the laws against the Anarchists were passed during the term of office of M. Carnot's successor. Salsou went down to Pont-sur-Seine in order to shoot at M. Casimir-Perier from behind a hedge. The Anarchist waited four hours, but as he could not see the ex-President he returned to Paris. He next determined to fire at the Shah, but his weapon was ineffective, and he was, moreover, instantly seized by General Parent and the Persian Grand Vizier. In court the prisoner said that he did not owe any grudge against the Shah personally, but he wanted to do something useful for the Anarchist idea. He was glad the attempt had a moral effect without the shedding of blood. The prisoner enunciated his subversive doctrines in a timid, hesitating manner, unlike Ravachol and Vaillant, and notably the latter, who was allowed to deliver a long and violent speech against society before his condemnation.

### The British Coinage.

Lord Avebury says that the penny was in one form or another the earliest coin, but in its present shape was first struck by George III. The sovereign was introduced by Henry VII., in 1489. The guinea was first struck by Charles II., and the last was minted in 1880. The tally system of recording payments lingered in England as late as 1826, and in 1770 a receipt for £20,000 from the East India Company was given by the English Government by means of the old wooden tallies.

### November.

I am the widow of the year,  
The staff I lean on is a spear  
Dropped from my dead lord's loosening hand  
When Winter slew him, took his land,  
And claimed his children all as slaves.  
My sons he made his kitchen-knaves,  
My daughters made his dancing-girls,  
They leap and twist in mazy whirls,  
And you who see them say, perchance,  
"How merrily the dead leaves dance!"  
I am a mourner that was queen,  
No page in cloth of gold is seen  
To bear my train or clear away  
The boughs across my path that sway.  
The North Wind blows upon his horn  
My foeman's hunting-call; forlorn  
Of all my splendour I lie down  
Nightly upon the bracken brown.  
I have no lily and no rose  
Save that which out of sunset grows;  
My sceptre's lost, my garland's soar,  
I am the widow of the year.

NORAH HOPPER, in *Westminster Gazette*.

### How the Boers Know that the Moon is Uninhabited.

A correspondent of the *Figaro* has been visiting the Boer prisoners in Ceylon. Here is an anecdote from his entertaining report:—

An old Boer, who had arrived ill at Colombo, was sent to the hospital. The medical man who looked after him, quite a young Englishman, who had just got his degree, was amused by the guileless good nature of his patient, and every day, on his round, he propounded some problem with him. One day he said, "I say, old boy, do you know the moon is inhabited?"

"Impossible," the old fox replied, with his habitual calm.

"But have you not heard that your friends the French have watched the inhabitants of the moon through the giant telescope at the Paris Exhibition follow their various occupations?"

"Impossible, my boy. If the moon were inhabited the English would long ago have tried to annex her."

## MEDINA HOME FOR CHILDREN

(Established 1896),  
4, SHEIL ROAD, LIVERPOOL.

This Institution has been established after having given the following facts careful consideration:—

Unfortunately seduction is a frequent occurrence in our midst, and the result is that a large number of girls in fairly respectable positions in life give birth to illegitimate children. Over 200 cases came before the Liverpool Police Courts last year, in which girls sought to obtain orders of affiliation against the putative fathers of children to which they had given birth, and at least ten times as many cases were probably settled privately and never came before the courts at all.

Quite *two thousand* illegitimate children are born each year in the city of Liverpool and neighbourhood—the second city of the British Empire, the centre of Christendom! What becomes of these children? In many instances they are put out to nurse, or a small sum of money is paid for them to be adopted. Cases are continually leaking out showing that baby-farming is still being conducted on a large scale in this country. Very often the parents of these children would be only too glad to pay a reasonable sum for their maintenance, provided that a suitable place was established for their reception where the children would receive proper attention and care.

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- 2.—It will ensure the children being well cared for and trained under good surroundings.
- 3.—It will give the mothers of the children an opportunity to retrieve their character, and once more return to the path of virtue and respectability.

With reference to this last matter it is unfortunately the case in England that while society forgives the man any transgressions of this nature, it remembers for ever a woman's slip. The way for a woman to return to virtue is made difficult, while the way for a man to commit indiscretions of this character is facilitated. Those who so cruelly hound down the weaker sex for the slightest deviation from the strictest morality appear to have entirely forgotten the teaching of Christ upon the subject. When an unfortunate erring woman was brought before him, he wrote on the sand—"Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone," and one by one her accusers, conscience-stricken, stole away, until none but Jesus of Nazareth and the woman were left, and then he turned to her and kindly said—"Neither do I condemn you. Go in peace and sin no more."

Critics may think such an institution as this will make it easy for wrongdoers to get rid of the fruits of their folly. Such is not the intention of the promoters, and proper precautions will be taken to prevent as far as possible such being the case. Enquiries will be made into each case before the child is admitted into the Home, and a second child will not be taken from the same mother.

We earnestly hope you will co-operate with us in this work of charity. We are anxious "to do some little good," and try if we cannot succeed in making one life even more bright—more good. That is our aim. The result we feel content to leave in the Almighty's hands, knowing that in the great Hereafter it will be shown our labours for Him were not in vain.

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August 22, 1900.

- Mohammad Ibrar Ansary (Kurkhman, India).
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