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Book Review of Live and Let Live

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LIVE AND LET LIVE:

Or, Domestic Service Illustrated. By the author of "Hope Leslie," "The Poor Rich Man, and The Rich Poor Man," &c. pp. 216, 12mo.

Another pleasing and sensible Tale, from the pen of Miss SEDGEWICK. It is designed to illustrate the duties and virtues that belong to the relation between free servants and their employers, in a region where (nominal) slavery does not exist. Although, from its having this aim, the story might be supposed to be wholly foreign to us of the South,—yet, on being read, it proves to be otherwise. Enough even of that relation—the relation of employer and employed—of hirer and hiring—exists among us, to make many of the book's lessons directly applicable here: but beyond this—beyond the mere childish function of running on all fours with the ease of this or that individual person,—the reader sees exemplified most winningly, the loveliness of truth, the sure triumph of integrity and industry, and the efficacy of even the scantiest means and the narrowest opportunities, in doing a large amount of good. However high he may be, moreover,—and however low, in comparison, may be those immediately around him,—he may rest assured there is a mutual dependence, after all, between him and them, which makes it his interest in the long run, to practise certain virtues towards them: truth, gentleness, forbearance, kindness, and respect—no less than firmness, consistency, and dignity; the virtues which conciliate, no

less than those which command. The good which comes of those virtues, and the evil of practising their opposites, our author here in almost every page illustrates.

The heroine of the story is *Lucy Lee*, the daughter of parents who have been reduced by her father's intemperance from wealth to poverty. At the age of fourteen, she is driven to seek a subsistence by engaging in domestic service: and the book mainly consists of what she experienced, in the various families where she served. The hero, *Charles Lovett*, a baker's son, is introduced to us first on a frozen morning, in the streets of New York, giving a loaf from his bread cart to Lucy, for her parents and their famishing children. Humble as these personages of the tale are, they go through it invested with an interest as engrossing, and a pathos as touching, as attends any full grown or titled hero and heroine of them all: we have not, for months, read any narrative which, in its turns of good and ill, so forced our lungs to crow with gladness, and anon brought our eyes so nearly to tears.

Lucy's father was bed-ridden; with a broken leg. When, after many painful and wearisome inquiries, her mother had found her a place, and it was announced to the little circle one Sunday evening, that Lucy was to leave home the next morning,—a scene ensued—if any thing so quietly sad can be called a scene—which we must transcribe.

"On Sunday evening Mrs. Lee announced to her family that Lucy was to leave home in the morning. Lee was reduced to passiveness, and a long interval of temperance, enforced though it was, had caused him to revert to some of the feelings of his better days. "Come to my bedside, Lucy," he said; "you are going out into the world, child—you'll find it's a selfish world—everybody is for number one—keep open a jealous eye—don't submit to be trampled on—I have seen enough of the tyranny of mankind—I have no faith in them—your mother will tell you a different story—your mother is one of the best of women, and her own goodness is a kind of veil between her and the wickedness of the world. She puts the best face on everything, but she does not seem to have much to say for the place you are going to—well, there is one consolation—you can always change it; if you have anything to complain of, let us know it—don't submit to imposition. Now I have given you all the advice I can think of—but oh, my child, what shall I do when you are gone? you have always been my pride and darling! you do everything just right for me—you fix my pillow easy, and you can make my tea just sweet enough, and you can always make Jemmie quiet, and the girls are contented when you are in the house. Oh, Lucy, if I could only do anything for you!"

"You can, father," replied Lucy, laying her cheek wet with tears to his; "always speak kind to mother and poor Jemmie!" Her father promised, and remembered, for the first time, that others were to suffer severely, as well as himself, from Lucy's departure.

Jemmie, the poor little boy who was the object of his sister's intense love and tender care, had received a terrible injury when he was three years old from a fall from a horse, on which his father, in a fit of intoxication, and in spite of his mother's entreaties and remonstrances, had insisted on placing him. The child's back was protruded, and his limbs withered, but his mind had a preternatural development. Lucy withdrew from her father's bed to prepare Jemmie's supper. He, meanwhile, was lying in his basket cradle, his soft black eye following his sister, and tear after tear trickling down his unnaturally pale cheek. She sat down on her accustomed seat beside him. He took in silence one or two swallows, and then gently pushing away the spoon, he said, "It chokes me, Lucy! I can't eat to night." Lucy set away the cup of tea, and putting her lips to his, whispered, "don't feel so, Jemmie."

"How can I help it, Lucy?"

"Oh, we must do as another says; look at the bright side, Jemmie. I shall come home every Sunday."

"Every Sunday; and oh, how long it will seem before Sunday comes! But it is not of myself I'm thinking, though it does make the tears come so when I think you won't be here to ask for what I want, and always to look pleasant, and leave your work, and come and read to me, and sing to me when the other girls want to be doing something else, and I can't bear to trouble mother; and you are never tired drawing me, and I can go to sleep if my breast aches ever so much when you bend over me, and stroke, and smile, and stroke as if it were always pleasant to do it; but it's not for myself only, Lucy," and here he sobbed aloud; "but I cannot bear to think you must go away from your own home, and work all day for people that will only pay you, and not love you as we do."

"Not as you do," replied Lucy, making an effort to speak calmly; "but I shall try to make them love me a little—I would be hard indeed to work for nothing but money, and I do not intend to do so. Mother says she never saw a family yet where there was not some one to love, and some good to do besides just work; I shall try; it's not very agreeable to have a hungry stomach, but a hungry heart must be a great deal worse; don't you think so, Jemmie?"

Some further dialogue among the brother and sisters, was followed by the singing of a hymn in concert; a habitual Sunday-evening recreation of Mrs. Lee, with her children. Then came a prayer, not too long, or offensively high-strained in its devotion. And when all the rest were asleep, Mrs. Lee enriched her daughter with some parting advices, at once plain, judicious, and impressive. Among other precepts, she counselled Lucy to be gentle, patient, kind, and generous, to the children of the family with whom she was going to live.

"Gentle, patient, and kind I can be; but how in the world generous? what shall I have to give?"

"Your time, your strength, your ingenuity; a person who will sit by a child and contrive it amusement for half an hour, is far more generous than she who goes out with a full purse and buys the same child an expensive toy. Our means of generosity do not depend on our riches; your generosity, dear Lucy, when you have foregone a pleasant walk of a Sunday, and sat down by poor little Jemmie, and made him happy for an hour, has often brought tears to my eyes."

In this illustration of generosity, there may be less dash and point than in corporal Trim's famous practical commentary upon "Honor thy father and mother;" but there is to the full as much moral beauty, and far more capability of daily use.

We do not intend a regular abridgment of the story; wishing only to excite curiosity, and not to sate it. Nor shall we quote more of the abundant good sense and good feeling embodied in the various dialogues, and in the author's own remarks.

Our praise, now, must be qualified with somewhat more of censure than was due to "The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man." The present work is inferior to that one, in several respects. The author's observations, though for the most part just, and sometimes striking, are sometimes also common-place and prosy.—We mark a few inaccuracies of expression. "Bibliopolist" is used, where bibliomaniac is meant, in p. 106. In p. 168, we find 'whom' put as nominative case to 'were created,' in this passage,—"the bees and the silk worm, whom she fancied were created solely to make honey, and spin silk." This blunder is the more surprising in Miss Sedgewick, as it is so frequent among members of Congress, and half fledged newspaper essayists, that we wonder how she can have

helped seeing and shunning it. In reading the book, we thought we saw one or two other morsels for criticism; but we cannot now find them: and so we close our black list.

Some of her personages being sprung from her own New England, our authoress does not fail to assign them a few of the usages, and phrases, of that region. Vulgar and mean Mrs. Simpson says, that a rusty black gown which she was trying to cheat Lucy Lee into purchasing, would, when sponged, and turned, and made over, "make quite a *scrumptious* dress." And when Lucy mildly declined being cheated, Dame Simpson said, "Well, every one to their notion; but I think, if I was ever so put to it, I should find a way to get mourning when my folks died, especially *where it was as it was*; it looks particular and wanting of respect to go without it—*looks is looks*." Presently her son, master Julius, exclaims, "If ma is *sarcy* to her help, she must expect her help to be *sarcy* to her." These, though not glaring specimens of New England dialect, are yet rather characteristic. The book contains others of the same kind: but Miss S. has been more sparing of them in this, than in any former one of her novels. She is, commonly, discreet in her use of provincialisms, and vulgarisms of all sorts.

There are nicely judging persons, who would banish these from fictitious discourse, as calculated to shock or to deprave the reader's taste. We confess a different opinion. They seem to us highly conducive, nay indispensable, to the truthful delineation of life and character. In what does the fidelity of portraiture consist? Why, in limning well those features which first and most universally strike the beholder's eye. Now, in contemplating any man's moral and intellectual aspect, the features which the soonest and most surely engage attention are, his peculiarities of speech. They are, to his inner man, what *expression* is to his face: and a picture of the one, misrepresenting *them*, would no more be recognized as a likeness, than a picture of his face, falsifying the expression. Accordingly, all the great master painters of human character, whenever they have put *language* into the lips, have adapted it, with the nicest discrimination, to the speaker's condition. It is the main element of his individuality—the most infallible mark by which we know him. Is he an Achilles? His diction, like himself, is graceful, strong, impetuous, and terrible. Is he the wise Ulysses? His copious and persuasive accents, soft as descending snows, sink melting into every heart. Is he the wide-ruling Agamemnon? The stately march of his majestic though inflated periods, bespeaks the king of kings; the haughty leader of confederated nations. Does Andromache bewail a living husband as already lost, and mourn for a country doomed? Her tide of grief is one so tender, feminine, and impassioned, as no wife—no woman—but herself, could pour into the sympathizing ear.—Nor is this appropriation of style confined to elevated personages. Vulgarians are made to speak in vulgar phrase. Thersites is foully abusive. Chremes, except when a particular juncture of the comedy demands a higher tone, crawls in a diction as mean as that of his own servant Davus.* Partridge, Black George, and Squire Western,—Tabitha Bramble, and

Mrs. Winifred Jenkins,—every clown and country wench, every tapster, bully, soldier, pedant, sexton, beadle, and silly justice drawn by Shakspeare—talk so exactly in the strain respectively suited to them, that the reader's imagination embodies them, and they seem to move and speak before his eyes, and within his hearing. The success of Scott and Edgeworth as delineators of real life—and they, after Smollett and Fielding, approach nearest to Shakspeare, among English writers—is in proportion to the fidelity with which they copy the *diction* of whatever rank they introduce—of the vulgar, no less than of the exalted.—The Brangtons, Madame Duval, and the rude sea-captain (we forget his name), in *Evelina*, stamp that novel, apart from the miracle of its being written by a girl of seventeen, as one of the most truthful in the language: and what is it that shews them off so distinctively? Their *dialect*.—That species of vulgarism called *provincialism*, has been deemed no less essential than other traits, to the accurate exhibition of character. Doctor Morgan, in *Roderick Random*—Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans in *Shakspeare*—every *Scottish* peasant in the *Waverley* Novels, and every Irish one in those of Miss Edgeworth,—attest the care and skill with which their authors deemed it necessary to mark, in each person, his country's peculiar mode of speech;—whenever it was designed to bring his origin to the reader's notice. Horace distinctly requires, that phraseology shall vary with *birthplace*, as well as with rank and station. "If," says he, "the speaker's language be not in unison with his fortunes, critics of every grade will laugh him to scorn. There must be a marked difference between the speech of a slave and a hero—of a ripe senior, and an impassioned, blooming youth—of a noble lady, and a gossip nurse—of a roving merchant, and a prosperous farmer—of a *Colchian*, and an *Assyrian*—of one bred at *Thebes*, and one reared at *Argos*."*—And we were not sure but that a nice scrutiny would show the various dialects employed by Homer, to be adapted to the respective provinces whence the speakers came: a scrutiny, to which it may be worth the while of some good Greek scholar, to devote a leisure hour.—Nor, *a priori*,—theoretically speaking, apart from authority and example—is there any good reason why provincial phraseology should not be put into the lips of provincial people, as well as sea phrases into those of sailors, or waiting-maid phrases into those of an abigail, or pedantry into the mouth of a lettered coxcomb, or chastely elegant language into that of a sensible and cultivated man. All are reducible under the same general law—that 'to convey a just idea of character, its emanations must be presented in forms which may at once be recognized as characteristic.'

There are special reasons why the local dialects of our country should be faithfully exemplified, in works of fiction professing to quote the words of our common people. These diversities of language tend, power-

* *Si dicentis erunt fortunæ absona dicta,
Romani tollent equites pedesque cachinnum.
Intererit multum Davusne loquatur, an heros;
Maturusne senex, an adhuc florentis juvenis
Fervidus; an matrona potens, an sedula nutrix;
Mercatorne vagus, cultorne virentis agelli;
Colchus, an Assyrius; Thebis nutritus, an Argis.*

* See the *Andria*, of Terenco.

fully to alienate the affections of our countrymen from one another: to inflame local animosities: to make discords, already too great, more fierce and implacable. One means of correcting such diversities is, to hold them up to the light, as *improprieties*: to put them into the mouths of persons, whom the reader will understand to be incorrect speakers, and whom he will therefore be unlikely to imitate.—In another way also, good may result. The inhabitants of each region are scarcely at all aware of the number and enormity of their own deviations from the proper English standard. They appear, to themselves, models of propriety: while their brethren, five hundred miles off, seem to speak in barbarisms. The latter, in their turn, cherish a corresponding opinion; and could probably surprise the former by the multitude of errors demonstrable in their dialect. Now, let popular writers *show up* these faults on both sides, in the persons they feign;—let the Northman and the Southron, each, see his own solecisms faithfully mirrored:—and mutual tolerance, if no more, will take the place of mutual contempt.—But, if provincialisms were well managed, more than tolerance might ensue. By association with good characters and pleasing incidents, they might at length become even agreeable, instead of odious. Accustomed to view them as coming from kind hearts and lovely lips, the far off reader would regard them with respect and affection: they would seem a *patois*—a simple, rustic style—connected in his thoughts with a thousand beauteous and delightful images. Such, it is well known, was the effect in England of that familiarity with the Scottish dialect, which followed the rising and diffusion of the reputation of Burns, and which was consummated by the witchery of Scott. The early prejudices against everything *Scottish*, which had lasted through centuries, and which stand out so fiercely in the pages of Junius,—have almost wholly vanished before the magic of literature, acting by one, natural expedient: and it was but yesterday, that the phrases of North Britain were perpetually heard, as classical, in the fashionable conversations of the sister kingdom. A similar wonder has been wrought, though to a less extent, with respect to Ireland.

We may be thought to have labored this point more than its obviousness required. But there is high precedent—no less than that of Dr. Johnson—for discarding all vulgarisms, and making “little fishes” (to use poor Goldy’s good humored sarcasm upon the doctor)—making “little fishes talk like whales.” What the effect was, upon the *vraisemblance* of his discourse through feigned persons, and consequently upon the *life-likeness* of the persons themselves, may be seen in *Rasselas*; where Nekayah and her waiting woman, Pekuah, talk in sentences long and swelling as those of the Prince, the poet, and the philosopher: or in the *Idler*, where “Betty Broom,” a house maid, begins a second letter, giving her own history, with the following sentence—“I have often observed that friends are lost by discontinuance of intercourse, without any offence on either part, and have long known, that it is more dangerous to be forgotten than to be blamed; I therefore,” &c. &c.: or in the *Rambler*, where Cleora, a young lady, begins her letter in this wise:—“Sir, There seems to be so little knowledge left in the world, and so little of that reflection practised, by which knowledge

is to be gained, that I am in doubt, whether I shall be understood, when I complain of want of opportunity for thinking; or whether a condemnation, which at present seems irreversible, to perpetual ignorance, will raise any compassion, either in you or your readers; yet I will venture to lay my state before you, because I believe it is natural to most minds to take some pleasure in complaining of evils, of which they have no reason to be ashamed.” Surely, as Sidney Smith* says, ‘Falstaff himself did not wear his petticoats with a worse grace.’ The reader may well cry out, with honest Sir Hugh Evans, ‘I like not, when a ’oman has a great peard: I spy a great peard under her muffler.’

Provincialisms too, we have lately heard censured,—and these in Miss Sedgewick’s novels,—by one, whose judgment on any subject is worthy always of respectful examination. We have much more to say, in support of our own opinion: but it seems to us, well enough sustained by the considerations we have suggested. Here, therefore, for the present and perhaps forever, we leave the topic.

*In the *Edinburg Review*, Sept. 1831.