<Saturday Review, 15 May 1869, 641-2>

<FINE FEELINGS.>

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There are people who pride themselves on the possession of what it

pleases them to call fine feelings. Perhaps, if we were all diligent

to call spades spades, these same fine feelings would come under a

less euphemistic heading; but, as things are, we may as well adopt the

softening gloze that is spread over the whole of our language, and

call them by a pretty name with the rest. People who possess fine

feelings are chiefly remarkable for the ease with which they take

offence; it being indeed impossible, even for the most wary of their

associates, to avoid giving umbrage in some shape, and generally when

least intended and most innocently minded. Nothing satisfies them. No

amount of attention, short of absolute devotion and giving them the

place of honour everywhere, sets them at ease with themselves or keeps

them in good-humour. If you ask them to your house, you must not dream

of mixing them up with the rest. Though you have done them an honour

in asking them at all, you must give them a marked position and bear

them on your hands for the evening. They must be singled out from the

herd and specially attended to; introduced to the nicest people;

made a fuss with and taken care of; else they are offended, and feel

they have been slighted ~~ their sensitiveness or fine feelings being a

kind of Chat Moss which will swallow up any quantity of <hi> petits soins </hi>

that may be thrown in, and yet never be filled. If they are your

intimate friends, you have to ask them on every occasion on which you

receive. They make it a grievance if they hear that you have had even

a dinner party without inviting them, though your space is limited and

you had them at your last gathering. Still, if it comes to their ears

that you have had friends and did not include them, they will come

down on you to a dead certainty if they are of the franker kind, and

ask you seriously, perhaps pathetically, how they have offended you?

If they are of the sullen sort they will meet you coldly, or pass you

by without seeing you; and will either drift into a permanent

estrangement or come round after a time, according to the degree of

acidity in their blood and the amount of tenacity in their character.

They have lost their friends many times for no worse offence than

this.

They are as punctilious too, as they are exacting. They demand visit

for visit, invitation for invitation, letter for letter. Though you

may be overwhelmed with serious work, while they have no weightier

burden strapped to their shoulders than their social duties and social

fineries, yet you must render point for point with them, keeping an

exact tally with not a notch too many on their side, if you want

to retain their acquaintance at all. And they must be always invited

specially and individually, even to your open days; else they will not

come at all; and their fine feelings will be hurt. They suffer no

liberties to be taken with them and they take none with others;

counting all frock-coat friendliness as taking liberties, and holding

themselves refined and you coarse if you think that manners <hi> sans

façon </hi> are pleasanter than those which put themselves eternally into

stays and stiff buckram, and are never in more undress than a Court

suit. They will not go into your house to wait for you, however

intimate they may be; and they would resent it as an intrusion,

perhaps an impertinence, if you went into theirs in their absence. If

you are at luncheon when they call, they stiffly leave their cards and

turn away; though you have the heartiest, jolliest manner of

housekeeping going, and keep a kind of open house for luncheon

casuals. They do not understand heartiness or a jolly manner of

housekeeping; open houses are not in their line and they will not be

luncheon casuals; so they turn away grimly, and if you want to see

them you have to send your servant panting down the street after them,

when, their dignity being satisfied, their sensitiveness smoothed down

and their fine feelings reassured, they will graciously turn back and

do what they might have done at first without all this fuss and fume.

When people who possess fine feelings are poor, their

sensitiveness is indeed a cross both for themselves and their friends

to bear. If you try to show them a kindness or do them a service, they

fly out at you for patronizing them, and say you humiliate them by

treating them as paupers. You may do to your rich acquaintances a

hundred things which you dare not attempt with your poor friends

cursed with fine feelings; and little offices of kindness, which pass

as current coin through society, are construed into insults with them.

Difficult to handle in every phase, they are in none more dangerous to

meddle with than when poor, though they are as bad if they have become

successful after a period of struggle. Then your attention to them is

time-serving, bowing to the rising sun, worshipping the golden calf,

&c. Else why did you not seek them out when they were poor? Why were

you not cap in hand when they went bare-headed? Why have you waited

until they were successful before you recognized their value?

It is funny to hear how bitter these sensitive folks are when they

have come out into the sunlight of success after the dark passage of

poverty; as if it had been possible to dig them out of their obscurity

when their name was still to make ~~ as if the world could recognize its

prophets before they had spoken. But this admission into the

penetralia after success is a very delicate point with people of fine

feelings, supposing always the previous struggle to have been hard;

and even if there has been no struggle to speak of, then there are

doubts and misgivings as to whether they are liked for themselves

or not, and morbid speculations on the stability and absolute value of

the position they hold and the attentions they receive, and endless

surmises of what would be the result if they lost their fame or wealth

or political power or social standing ~~ or whatever may be the hook

whereon their success hangs, and their fine feelings are impaled. The

act of wisdom most impossible to be performed by these self-torturers

is the philosophic acceptance of life as it is and of things as they

fall naturally to their share.

Women remarkable for fine feelings are also remarkable for that uneasy

distrust, that insatiable craving which continually requires

reassuring and allaying. As wives or lovers they never take a man's

love, once expressed and loyally acted on, as a certainty, unless

constantly repeated; hence they are always pouting or bemoaning their

loveless condition, getting up pathetic scenes of tender accusation or

sorrowful acceptance of coolness and desertion, which at the first may

have a certain charm to a man because flattering to his vanity, but

which pall on him after a short time, and end by annoying and

alienating him; thus bringing about the very catastrophe which was

deprecated before it existed.

Another characteristic with women of fine feelings is their inability

to bear the gentlest remonstrance, the most shadowy fault-finding. A

rebuke of any gravity throws them into hysterics on the spot; but even

a request to do what they have not been in the habit of doing, or to

abstain from doing that which they have used themselves to do, is

more than they can endure with dry-eyed equanimity. You have to live

with them in the fool's paradise of perfectness, or you are made to

feel yourself an unmitigated brute. You have before you the two

alternatives of suffering many things which are disagreeable and which

might easily be remedied, or of having your wife sobbing in her own

room and going about the house with red eyes and an expression of

exasperating patience under ill-treatment, far worse to bear than the

most passionate retaliation. Indeed women may be divided broadly into

those who cry and those who retort when they are found fault with;

which, with a side section of those wooden women who <p> 'don't care,'

</p> leaves a very small percentage indeed of those who can accept a rebuke

good-temperedly, and simply try to amend a failing or break off an

unpleasant habit, without parade of submission and sweet Griseldadom

unjustly chastised, but kissing the rod with aggravating meekness.

For there are women who can make their meekness a more potent weapon

of offence than any passion or violence could give. They do not cry,

neither do they complain, but they exaggerate their submission till

you are driven half mad under the slow torture they inflict. They look

at you so humbly; they speak to you in so subdued a voice, when they

speak to you at all, which is rarely and never unless first addressed;

they avoid you so pointedly, hurrying away if you are going to meet

them about the house, on the pretext of being hateful to your

sight and doing you a service by ridding you of their presence; they

are so ostentatiously careful that the thing of which you mildly

complained under some circumstances shall never happen again under any

circumstances, that you are forced at last out of your entrenchments,

and obliged to come to an explanation. You ask them what is amiss? or,

what do they mean by their absurd conduct? and they answer you

<p> 'Nothing,' </p> with an injured air or affected surprise at your query.

What have they done that you should speak to them so harshly? They are

sure they have done all they could to please you, and they do not know

what right you have to be vexed with them again. They have kept out of

your way and not said a word to annoy you; they have only tried to

obey you and to do as you ordered, and yet you are not satisfied! What

can they do to please you? and why is it that they never can please

you whatever they do? You get no nearer your end by this kind of

thing; and the only way to bring your Griselda to reason is by having

a row; when she will cry bitterly, but finally end by kissing and

making up. You have to go through the process. Nothing else, save a

sudden disaster or an unexpected pleasure of large dimensions, will

save you from it; but as we cannot always command earthquakes nor

godsends, and as the first are dangerous and the last costly, the

short and easy method remaining is to have a decisive <p> 'understanding,'

</p> which means a scene and a domestic tempest with smooth sailing till

the next time.

Sometimes fine feelings are hurt by no greater barbarity than that

which is contained in a joke. People with fine feelings are seldom

able to take a joke; and you will hear them relating, with an injured

accent and as a serious accusation, the merest bit of nonsense you

flung off at random, with no more intention of wounding them than had

the merchant the intention of putting out the Efreet's eye when he

flung his date-stones in the desert. As you cannot deny what you have

said, they have the whip-hand of you for the moment; and all you can

hope for is that the friend to whom they detail their grievance will

see through them and it, and understand the joke if they cannot. Then

there are fine feelings which express themselves in exceeding

irritation at moral and intellectual differences of opinion ~~ fine

feelings bound up in questions of faith and soundness of doctrine,

having taken certain moral and theological views under their especial

patronage and holding all diversity of judgment therefrom a personal

offence. The people thus afflicted are exceedingly uncomfortable folks

to deal with, and manage to make <reg orig=”every one”> everyone </reg> else uncomfortable too. You

hurt their feelings so continually and so unconsciously, that you

might as well be living in a region of steel-traps and spring-guns,

and set to walk blindfold among pitfalls and water-holes. You fling

your date-stone here too, quite carelessly and thinking no evil,

and up starts the Efreet who swears you have injured him intentionally.

You express an opinion without attaching any particular importance

to it, but you hurt the fine feelings which oppose it, and unless you

wish to have a quarrel you must retract or apologize. As the worst

temper always carries the day, and as fine feelings are only bad tempers

under another name, you very probably do apologize; and so the matter

ends.

Other people show their fineness of feeling by their impatience of

pain and the tremendous grievance they think it that they should

suffer as others ~~ they say, so much more than others. These are the

people who are great on the theory of nervous differences, and who

maintain that their cowardice and impatience of suffering means an

organization like an Æolian harp for sensibility. The oddest part of

the business is the sublime contempt which these sensitives have for

other persons' patience and endurance, and how much more refined and

touching they think their own puerile sensibility. But this is a

characteristic of humanity all through; the masquerading of evil under

the name of good being one of the saddest facts of an imperfect nature

and a confused system of morals. If all things showed their faces

without disguise, we should have fine feelings placed in a different

category from that in which they stand at this moment, and the world

would be the richer by just so much addition of truth.