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<OTHERWISE-MINDED.>

<Eliza Lynn Linton>

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Every now and then we receive from America a word or a phrase which

enriches the language without vulgarizing it--something, both

more subtle and more comprehensive than our own equivalent,

which we recognize at once as the better thing of the two. Thus

'otherwise-minded,' which some American writers use with such quaint

force, is quite beyond our old 'contradictious' expressing the full

meaning of contradictious and adding a great deal more. But if we have

not hitherto had the word we have the thing, which is more to the

purpose; and foremost among the powers which rule the world may be

placed 'otherwise-mindedness' in its various phases of active

opposition and passive immobility--the contradictiousness which must

fight on all points and which will not assent to any. At home,

otherwise-mindedness is an engine of tremendous power, ranking next to

sulks and tears in the defensive armoury of women; while men for the

most part use it in a more aggressive sense, and seldom content

themselves with the passive quietude of mere inertness.

An otherwise-minded person, if a man, is almost always a tyrant and a

bully, with decided opinions as to his right of making all about him

dance to his piping--his piping never giving one of their own

measures. If a woman, she is probably a superior being subjected to

domestic martyrdom while intended by nature for a higher intellectual

life,--doomed to the drudgery of housekeeping while yearning for the

æsthetic and panting after the ideal. She is generally dignified in

her bearing and of a cold, unappeasable discontent. She neither scolds

nor wrangles, though sometimes, no rule being without its exception,

she is peevish and captious and degenerates into the commonplace of

the \_Naggleton\_ type. But in the main she bounds herself to the

expression of her otherwise-mindedness in a stately if dogged manner,

and shows a serene disdain for her opponents, which is a trifle more

offensive than her undisguised satisfaction with herself. Nothing can

move her, nothing beat her off her holding; but then she offers no

points of attack. She is what she is on principle; and what can you

say to an opposition dictated by motives all out of reach of your own

miserable little groundling ideas? Where you advocate expediency, she

maintains abstract principles; if you are lenient to weaknesses, she

is stern to sin; if you would legislate for human nature as it is, she

will have nothing less than the standard of perfection; and when you

speak of the absolutism of facts, she argues on the necessity of

keeping the ideal intact, no matter whether any one was ever known to

attain to it or not. But if she finds herself in different company

from your own looser kind--say with Puritans of a strongly ascetic

caste--then she veers round to the other side, on the ground of

fairness; and for the benefit of fanatics propounds a slip-shod

easygoing morality which shuffles beyond your own lines. This she

calls keeping out of extremes and discouraging exaggeration. This

latter manifestation however, is not very frequently the case with

women: the otherwise-minded among them being almost always of the

rigid and ascetic class who despise the pleasant little vanities, the

graceful frivolities, the loveable frailties which make life easy and

humanity delightful, and who take their stand on the loftiest, the

most unelastic, not to say the grimmest, ethics. They have had it

borne in on them that they are to defy Baal and withstand;

consequently they do defy him, and they do withstand, at all four

corners stoutly.

To be otherwise-minded naturally implies having a mind; and of what

use is intellect if it cannot see all through and round a subject, and

pick the weak places into holes? Hence the otherwise-minded are

uncompromising critics and terrible fellows at scenting their prey. As

is the function of certain creatures--vultures, crows, flies, and

others--so is that of these children of Zoilus when dealing with

subjects not understood, or only guessed at with more or less

blundering in the process.

Take one of the class at a lecture on the higher branches of a science

of which he has not so much as thoroughly mastered the roots, and

wherein this higher analysis offers certain new and perhaps startling

results. It would seem that the sole thing possible to him who is

ignorant of the matter in hand is to listen and believe; but your

otherwise-minded critic is not content with the tame modesty of

humbleness. What if the subject be over his head, cannot he crane his

neck and look? has he not common-sense to guide him? and may he not

criticize in the block what he cannot dissect in detail? At the least

he can look grave, and say something about the danger of a little

knowledge; and fallen man's dangerous pride of intellect; and his

absolute and eternal ignorance; and the lecturer not making his

meaning clear--as how should he when he probably does not understand

his own subject nor what he wanted to say?--and what becomes of

accepted truths if such things are to be received? Be sure of this,

that otherwise-mindedness must sling its stone, whether it knows

exactly what it is aiming at or not. It not unfrequently happens that

the stone is after the pattern of a boomerang, and comes back on the

slinger's own pate with sounding effect, convicting him of ignorance

if of nothing worse, and a love of opposition so great that it

destroys both his power of perceiving truth and the sense of his own

incapacity.

But the otherwise-minded is nothing if not superior to his company;

and truth is after all relative as well as multiform, and needs

continual nice adjustment to make it balance fairly. The great

representative assembly of humanity must have its independent members

below the gangway who vote with no party; and if we were all on the

right side the devil's advocate would have no work to do; so that even

otherwise-mindedness on the wrong side has its uses, and must not be

wholly condemned. For the world would fare badly without its natural

borers and hole-pickers, its finders-out of weak places, its stone

walls to resist assertion and advance; and ants and worms make good

mould for garden flowers.

The constitutionally otherwise-minded are the worst partizans in the

world and never take up a cause heartily--never with more than one

hand, that they may leave the other free for a bit of intellectual

prestidigitation if need be, when their audience changes its character

and complexion. The only time when they are devoted adherents is if

their own family is decidedly in the opposite ranks, when they come

out from among them with scrip and spear, and go over to the enemy

without failing a single button of the uniform. This is specially true

of young people and of women; both of whom call their natural love of

opposition by the name of religious principle or moral duty. Youths

just fresh from the schools, bent on the regeneration of mankind and

thinking that they can do in a few years what society has been

painfully labouring to accomplish ever since the first savage clubbed

his neighbour for stealing his hoard of roots or carrying off his own

private squaw, are sure to be intensely otherwise-minded and to

understand nothing of harmonious working with the old plant. Red

Republicans under the family flag of purple and orange; free-thinkers

in the church where the paternal High and Dry holds forth on Sundays

on the principle of the divine inspiration of the English translation

bound in calf and lettered \_cum privilegio\_; Romanists worshipping

saints and relics in the very heart of the Peculiar People who put no

trust in man nor works--we know them all; ardent, enthusiastic,

uncompromising and horribly aggressive; with the down just shading

their smooth young chins, and the great book of human life barely

turned at the page of adolescence. Yet this is a form of

otherwise-mindedness which, though we laugh at and are often annoyed

by it, we must treat gently on the whole. We cannot be cruel to a

fervour, even when insolently expressed, which we know the world will

tame so soon, and which at the worst is often better than the dead

level of conformity; even though its zeal is not unmixed with conceit,

and a burning desire for the world's good is not free from a few

slumbering embers of self-laudation and the 'last infirmity.'

In a house inhabited by the otherwise-minded--and one member of a

family is enough to set the whole ruck awry--nothing is allowed to go

smoothly or by default; nothing can be done without endless

discussion; and all the well-oiled casters of compromise, good-nature,

'it does not signify,' &c., by which life runs easily in most places

are rusted or broken. At table there is an incessant cross-fire of

objections and of arguments, more or less intemperately conducted and

never coming to a satisfactory conclusion. There are so many places

too, which have been rubbed sore by this perpetual chafing, that a

stranger to the secrets of the domestic pathology is kept not only in

a fever of annoyance, but in an ague of dread, at the temper shown

about trifles, and the deadly offence that seems to lurk behind quite

ordinary topics of conversation. Not knowing all that has gone before,

he is not prepared for the present uncomfortable aspect of things, and

in fact is like a boy reading algebra, understanding nothing of what

he sees, though the symbolizing letters are familiar enough to him.

The family quarrel about everything; and when they do not quarrel they

argue. If one wants to do something that must be done in concert, the

others would die rather than unite; and days, seasons and wishes can

never be got to work themselves into harmonious coalition. When they

are out 'enjoying themselves'--language is arbitrary and the sense of

words not always clear--they cannot agree on anything; and you may

hear them fire off scornful squibs of otherwise-mindedness across the

rows of prize flowers or in the intervals of one of Beethoven's

sonatas. And if they cannot find cause for disagreement on the merits

of the subject before them, they find it in each other. For

otherwise-mindedness is like the ragged little princess in the German

fairy tale, who proved her royal blood by being unable to sleep on the

top of seven feather-beds--German feather-beds--beneath all of which

one single bean had been placed as the test of her sensibility. Give

it but the chance of a scuffle, the ghost of a coat-tail to tread on,

an imaginary chicken-bone among the down, and you may be sure that the

opportunity will not be lost. When we are on the look-out for beans we

shall find them beneath even seven feather-beds; and when shillelahs

abound there will never be wanting the trail of a coat-tail across the

path. So we find when we have to do with the otherwise-minded who will

not take things pleasantly, and can never be got to see either beauty

or value in their surroundings. Let one of these have a saint for a

wife, and he will tell you saints are bores and sinners the only

house-mates to be desired. Let him change his state, and this time

pick up the sinner in longing for whom he has so often vexed the poor

saint's soul, and he will find domestic happiness to consist in the

companionship of a seraph of the most exalted kind. If he has Zenobia,

he wants Griselda; if Semiramis, King Cophetua's beggar-maid. The dear

departed, who was such a millstone in times past, becomes the emblem

of all that is lovely in humanity when a shaft has to be thrown at the

partner of times present; and the marriage that was notoriously

ill-assorted is painted in gold and rose-colour throughout, and its

discords are mended up into a full score of harmony when the new wife

or the new husband has to be snubbed, for no other reason than the

otherwise-mindedness which cannot agree with what it has.

Children and servants come in for their share of this uncomfortable

temper which reverses the old adage about the absent, and which, so

far from making these in the wrong, transfers the burden of blame to

those present and conveniently forgets its former litany of complaint.

No one would be more surprised than those very absent if they heard

themselves upheld as possessors of all possible virtues when,

according to their memory, they had been little better than

concretions of wickedness and folly in the days of their subjection to

criticism. They need not flatter themselves. Could they return, or if

they do return, to the old place, they will be sure to return to the

old conditions; and the praise lavished on them when they are absent,

by way of rebuke to those unlucky ones on the spot, will be changed

for their benefit into the blame and the rebuke familiar to them. In

fact no circumstances whatever touch the central quality of the

otherwise-minded. They must have something to bite, to grumble at, to

rearrange, at least in wish, if not in deed. If only they had been

consulted, nothing would have gone wrong that has gone wrong; and 'I

told you so' is the shibboleth of their order. It is gall and wormwood

to them when they are obliged to agree, and when, for very decency's

sake, they must praise what indeed offers no points to condemn. But

even when they get caught in the trap of unanimity they contrive to

say something quite unnecessary about evils which no one was thinking

of, and which have nothing to do with the case in point. 'But' is

their mystic word, their truncated form of the Tetragrammaton which

rules the universe; and whatever their special private denomination,

they all belong in bulk to the

Sect whose chief devotion lies

In odd perverse antipathies;

In falling out with that or this,

And finding somewhat still amiss.