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<SOMETHING TO WORRY.>

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A humane condescension to instinct has lately supplied ladies' lapdogs

with an ingenious instrument of mock torture, in the shape of an

india-rubber head which hops about the room on the smallest

persuasion, and squeaks shrilly when caught and worried. The animal

has thus the pleasure of mauling something which seems to suffer from

the process; while in reality it hurts nothing, but expends its

tormenting energy on a quite unfeeling creature, whose \_raison d'être\_

it is to be worried and made to squeak. It would be well for some of

us if those people who must have something to worry would be content

with a creature analogous to the lapdog's india-rubber head. It would

do just as well for them, and it would save us who feel a great deal

of real pain. Tippoo Sahib was a wise man when he caused his automaton

to be made, in which a tiger seemed to be tearing at the prostrate

figure of a wooden European, and the group gave out mingled growls and

groans at the turning of a handle in its side. It might have been a

dismal fancy perhaps; but the fancy was better than the reality, and

did quite as well for the purpose, which was that the monarch should

keep himself in good humour by the charm of something to worry.

There are few pains in life greater than the companionship of one of

those ill-conditioned people who must have something to worry, and who

are only happy with a grievance. No fortune, no fair possessions of

love nor beauty, nor what one would think must be the sources of

intense happiness, are spells to exorcise the worrying spirit--opiates

to allay the worrying fever. If in the midst of all they have to make

them blessed among the sons of men, there hops the squeaking ball, in

an instant every good thing belonging to them is forgotten, and there

is nothing in heaven and earth but that one obtruding grievance, that

one intolerable annoyance. Nothing is too small for them to make into

a gigantic evil and be offended at accordingly. They will not endure

with patience the minutest, nor the most inevitable, of the crosses of

life--things which every one has to bear alike; which no one can help;

and concerning which the only wisdom is to meet them with

cheerfulness, tiding over the bad time as quietly as possible till

things take a turn. Not they. They know the luxury of having something

to complain of; and they like to feel wronged. The wind is in the east

and they are personally injured; the rain has come on a pleasure day,

or has not come in a seed-sowing week, and they fret grimly and make

every one about them uncomfortable, as if the weather were a thing to

be arranged at will, and a disappointing day were the result of wilful

mismanagement. Life is a burden to them and all about them because the

climate is uncertain and the elements are out of human control. They

make themselves the most wretched of martyrs too, if they are in a

country they do not like; and they never do like the country they are

in. If down in a valley, they are suffocated; if in the plains or on a

table-land, they hate monotony and long for undulations; if they are

in a wooded district, they dread the damp and worry about the autumn

exhalations; if on a moor, who can live without green hills and

hedgerow birds? They are sorely exercised concerning clay and gravel;

and they find as many differences in the London climate within a

half-hour's walk as those who do not worry would find between St.

Andrews and Mentone. But they are no nearer the right thing wherever

they go; and the people belonging to them may as well bear the worry

at Brompton as at Hampstead, in Cumberland as in Cornwall, and so save

both trouble and expense.

These worrying folk never let a thing alone. If they have once found a

victim they keep him; crueller in this than cats and tigers which play

with their prey only for a time, but finally give the \_coup de grâce\_

and devour it, bones and all. But worrying folk never have done with

their prey, be it person or thing, and have an art of persistence--a

way of establishing a raw--that drives their poor victims into

temporary insanity. This persistency indeed, and the total

indifference to the maddening effect they produce, are the oddest

parts of the performance. They begin again for the twentieth time,

just where they left off; as fresh as if they had not done it all

before, and as eager as if you did not know exactly what was coming.

And it makes no kind of difference to them that their worrying has no

effect, and that things go on exactly as before--exactly as they would

have done had there been no fuss about them at all.

Granting however, that the old proverb about constant dropping and

inevitable wearing is fulfilled, and that worrying accomplishes its

end, it had better have been let alone; for no one was ever yet

worried into compliance with an uncongenial or abandonment of a

favourite habit, who did not make the worrier wish more than once that

he had let matters remain where he had found them. Imbued with the

unfortunate belief that all things and persons are to be ordered to

their liking, the worriers think themselves justified in flying at the

throat of everything they dislike, and in making their dislikes

peculiar grievances. The natural inclination of boys to tear their

clothes and begrime their hands, to climb up ladders at the peril of

their necks, and to make themselves personally unpleasant to every

sense, is a burden laid specially on them, if they chance to be the

parents of vigorous and robust youth. The cares of their family are

greater than the cares of any other family; and no one understands

what they go through, though every one is told pretty liberally. Hint

at the sufferings of others, and they think you unfeeling and

unsympathetic; try to cheer them, and you affront them; unless you

would offend them for life, you must listen patiently to the

repetition of their miseries continually twanged on one string, and

feign the commiseration you cannot feel.

It is impossible for these people to go through life in amity with all

men. They may be very good Christians theoretically; most likely they

are; according to the law of compensation by which theory and practice

so seldom go together; but the elementary doctrines of peace and

goodwill are beyond their power of translation into deeds. They have

always some one who is Mordecai to them; some one connected with them,

whose habits, nature, whose very being is a decided offence, and whom

therefore they worry without mercy. You never know these people to be

without a grievance. It may be husband or brother, friend or servant,

as it happens; but there is sure to be some one whose existence puts

them out of tune, and on whom therefore they revenge the discord by

continual worrying. Yet they would be miserable if their grievance

were withdrawn, leaving them for the time without a victim. It would

be only for a time indeed; for the exit of one would be the signal for

the entrance of another. The millennium to these people would be

intolerable dullness; and if they were translated into heaven itself,

they would of a certainty travesty the child's desire, and ask for a

little devil to worry, if not to play with. Women are sad sinners in

this way. Men who stay at home and potter about get like them, but

women, who are naturally nervous, and whose lives are spent in small

things, are generally more worrying than men; at least in daily life

and at home. Indeed, the woman who is more cheerful and hopeful than

easily depressed, and who does not worry any one, is the exception

rather than the rule, and to be prized as one would prize any other

rarity.

Children come in for a good deal of domestic worrying; and under

pretence of good management and careful education are used as mamma's

squeaking heads, which lie ever handy for a chase. Any one who has

been in a family where the mother is of a naturally worrying temper,

and where a child has a peculiarity, can appreciate to the full what

the propensity is. With substantial love at heart, the mother leads

the wretched little creature a life worse than that of the typical

dog; and makes of its peculiarity, whatever that may be, a personal

offence which she is justified in resenting and never leaving alone.

And if it be so with her children, much more is it with her husband,

for whom her tenderness is naturally less. Though concerning him she

evidently does not know her own mind; for when she has worried into

his grave the man who all his life was such a trial to her, such a

cross, perhaps such a brute, she puts on widow's weeds of the deepest

hue, and worries her sons and daughters with her uncomfortable

reaction in favour of 'poor papa,' whose virtues come to the front

with a bound. Or may be she continues the old song in a different key,

substituting compassion and a sublime forgiveness in place of her

former annoyance, but harping all the same on the old strain and

rasping the old sores.

Infelicitous at home, these worrying people are almost more than flesh

and blood can bear as travelling companions abroad. Always sure that

the train is going to start and leave them behind; that their landlord

is a robber and in league with brigands; that they will be dashed down

the precipice which tens of thousands have passed in safety before;

worrying about the luggage; and where is that trunk? and are you

\_sure\_ you saw the portmanteau safe? and have you the keys? and the

custom-house officers will find that bottle of eau-de-cologne and

charge both fine and duty for it; and have you changed the money? and

are you sure you have enough? and what are the fares? and you have

been cheated; and what a bill for only one breakfast and one

night!--and so on.

The person who undertakes a journey with constitutional worriers ought

to have nerves of iron and a head of ice. They will leave nothing to

the care of ordinary rule, let nothing go by faith. The luggage is

always being lost, according to them; accidents are certain to happen

half a dozen times a day; and the beds are invariably damp. Their

mosquito bites are worse than any other person's; and no one is

plagued with small beasts as they are. They worry all through the

journey, till you wish yourself dead twenty times at least before the

month is out; and when they come home, they tell their friends they

would have enjoyed themselves immensely had they been allowed, but

they were so much annoyed and worried they lost half the pleasure of

the trip. So it will be to the end of time. As children, fretful; as

boys and girls, impatient and ill-tempered; as men and women,

worrying, interfering, restless; as old people, peevish and

exacting--they will die as they have lived; and the world about them

will draw a deep breath of relief when the day of their departure

comes, and will feel their atmosphere so much the lighter for their

loss. Poor creatures! They are conscious of not being loved as they

love, and as perhaps theoretically, they deserve to be loved; but it

would be impossible, even by a surgical operation, to make them

understand the reason why; and that it is their own habit of

incessantly worrying which has chilled the hearts of their friends,

and made them such a burden to others that their removal is a release

and their absence the promise of a life of peace.