

WOMEN AS KNOW NOTHINGS.

Mrs F. F. VICTOR.

I wonder if the woman who grasps her closed parasol in the middle, and when she sits down beside us in a car, or elsewhere, threatens our eyes with the pointed end, is a mother-in-law? I ask for information, because it is currently believed that this class of persons do all the disagreeable things that are suffered by luckless benedicts. The woman who looks daggers at another passenger for presuming to sit anywhere near her ruffles and bouffes, is so evidently on the road to be one, that I need not inquire about her; nor about that woman who on entering any public conveyance immediately proceeds to put into the hands of her children cakes, fruits, and candies, with which they smear themselves and their neighbors. It is still less necessary to ask concerning the woman who carries a pet dog about with her, to the disgust of every one that happens to be in her vicinity. These last two things are diabolical enough for the most satanic of mother-in-laws. There are without doubt many more of these odious practices that never would have come in vogue but for the fact that men's wives have mothers; and that these mothers insist on taking an interest in the wives and children of their sons-in-law.

When I consider what a stupendous failure woman is, in every relation of life, and especially in that of legal mother to her daughter's husband, I am overwhelmed with despair, and ready to become an Adventist, or any other event-ist that might promise to remove the sex bodily out of the world—comfortably too, in decent robes, and angels' wings. If we stay here much longer we may have to go to our cremation, without waiting for the death of our husbands, as the Hindoo widows do. We shall only be permitted to wait until the marriage of our daughters, when, being of no further consequence—being, in fact, the family's closet skeleton—our "funeral baked meats shall furnish forth the marriage feast" of our sons-in-law, in order that the threatening ghost of the mother-in-law may be forever laid, and daughter's husbands may live in a state of security. Happy, in that day, will be the mother of sons only, for she will be held sacred; and daughters-in-law will be forced to allow her to administer catnip-tea, and look after the disbursement of the house-keeping fund without remonstrance; and more than all, she will never be named by the infelicitous appellation of mother-in-law,—that belongs only to those unhappy women who have neglected to strangle their girl-babies in the cradle, and thereby have incurred, through an unfortunate chain of circumstances, this fearful blame.

But to return to the parasol—whatever does make an awkward woman so peculiarly awkward with that dangerous weapon, an umbrella? The parasol may be fairly considered an index to civilization in the way it is handled. There are as many shades of difference in carrying this portable thatch as you may find strata in society; and it is not the "recent deposit" that flourishes it in people's faces. By recent deposit, I mean of course, the "upper crust;" and by this you will understand that I think those who do it are from the fossiliferous strata; and I wish they would take notice not to worry dignified gentlemen, and petulant journalists, in that way in the future. Of course it is because they do not know any better; but it is quite time they did; and that is just the reason I am taking them to task about it.

But there are so many things that women do not know, that they ought to know! I do not blame them for being ignorant of common law, or the plainest rules of health, or the simplest principles of mechanics; for the privilege to know these things men arrogate to themselves. I do not exactly blame the woman who gives up to an old friend of her dead husband his

unpaid note, upon the representation that "it is all right; the note is of no consequence, but he will pay it in a week or two; just let him have it now to save bother," etc., etc. I do not, as I say, quite feel like reproaching her for being the simplest creature alive; and certainly no body is to blame for being simple. And similarly no man is to blame for being a scoundrel; because, probably he just "grewed so" as Topsy did, or the Pomeroy boy; and natural scoundrels ought not to be so severely dealt with as artificial ones. Anybody can see the force of this proposition, with half an eye to the interests of society. The law of love, in favor in society at present, judges it wiser and better to let a good many simple or innocent people be victimized by robbers and murderers, rather than for these few unfortunates to be put out of society's way. It is expected that a great reform is to be accomplished by kindly allowing the criminally inclined to do as their impulses direct them, and compelling the honest and safe part of the community to pay the expenses incident to the indulgence of their abnormal propensities. It is also hoped, that by encouraging depraved instincts in the parents, a virtuous progeny will bless the future; on the principle, no doubt, that "the hair of the same dog cures the bite."

And I feel a sort of hesitancy in expressing my opinion of that woman who now gets her bread by doing odd jobs for house-keepers, because she was credulous enough to think she must put her name to certain papers presented by a villainous lawyer, who lives by hunting up titles, and watching for the decease of the owners of valuable lots. This industrious individual clearly earns his right to widow's estate by looking after it so closely as to know all about it:—and how is the widow to know but all lawyers are alike, and the word of each one is law? Still, though I have not denied this man's right to acquire property by getting unsuspecting women to sign it away; or by ferreting out flaws in titles that have never been disputed, soon after the death of the owner; and frightening the widow into paying him a magnificent bonus for making everything safe (?)—I have a sort of unpleasant conviction that the woman is to blame for being such a ninny. I have an impression in a general way, that if these women had not been satisfied to be childishly ignorant, they need not have been.

Again, when a poor woman, with several children to support, puts all her money into stocks, and leaves the certificates in the hands of a broker who in failing fails also to account for the stock, I do not blame the broker—oh no!—I simply think "what a silly woman!" Of course the broker knows that she is silly, and being mortal, prefers wronging her, to encountering the wrath of some big-fisted man and broker. It would not do to be too hard on the broker; and I choose, in any case to be severe on the weaker party. It is safer. And therefore I say all these victimized poor women ought to be ashamed of themselves for being victimized. Perhaps ignorance of the rules of business is less culpable, in our sex, than ignorance of parasol handling and other conventionalities; but then it is really more fatal to our pecuniary interests, and ought therefore to be avoided. We may be willing, ourselves, to drudge in other people's houses for a bare subsistence, while some man enjoys our money; but the thoughtless outside world cannot forgive our having such bad taste—and the world is quite right—we ought not to be forgiven.

There are certain other minor sins of ignorance that we commit, and for which we deserve and receive the maledictions and contempt of man; and on account of which they dislike to do business for us or with us. In the first place women, from the habit of their lives, which is to always be doing something that has neither beginning nor end, do not understand the

value of time as applied to stated pursuits; therefore they allow themselves to be estimated as bores, for trespassing without reflection upon the time of those business persons, men or women, who can ill afford to spend their working hours in idle talk. The reproach often applied to our sex, that we have tongues "hung in the middle and wagging at both ends," does not come so much from the fact that we talk on an average more than men, as that we talk more inconsequently. I do not know anything more tiresome, myself, than talk that means nothing—talk just for talk's sake. Yet women think one of their own sex unsocial and unkind who is not willing to listen and reply to meaningless remarks that break in upon what else might be a train of thought, but being constantly interrupted never reaches the dignity of thought at all. I have seen women who evidently considered it their duty, the non-performance of which would amount to a serious breach of good manners, to harangue a roomful of people, though in the effort to perform this labor they had to go over ever topic in their personal experience, from their childhood to the teething of their last baby. This style of talk—it cannot be called conversation—when carried into the business places of men, who have a certain amount of work to accomplish in a given time—becomes even more irritating than it is in the home-place.

Another trait of women is, that not knowing anything, or at best very little about any kinds of business outside of the house, when they come to have any to perform, they are in the plight of children desiring to read without knowing the alphabet; and being conscious of their ignorance, and of the opportunity it furnishes for impositions by the unscrupulous, and errors on their own part, are in an uncomfortable and uncertain state of mind about it that leads them to pursue a vacillating course very annoying to their advisors. The fickleness of purpose arising from doubt, is even more tolerable, however, than that foolish assurance that comes from having learned a little of something and mistaken that little for the essence of the whole matter. A flippant, vain, boastful, ignorant woman, is a scourge to the patience of everybody, but particularly men's, because they have a traditional dislike to independence in women that makes it of the highest importance we should know well and thoroughly whatever we assume to know. Men will not accept a woman in a man's place who only can do as well as the man; she must do better, in order to furnish him with an excuse to himself for allowing her to do at all. It is not a sufficient reason to him that we need anything. He is accustomed to hear that women are needy, and accustomed to see them depend on chance for their supplies. It is something that he does not feel like meddling with; and if you should foolishly demand his good offices on the ground that you are a woman, very likely he is saying in his heart, "no business to have been a woman!" To put on vain, half-conceited and half-defiant airs of knowing things that it is not possible with your small experience you should know thoroughly, is only to condemn yourselves to utter disrespect; and I think that the greasy and sticky hands of your darlings applied to their broadcloth, or the sight of your poodle in the place where only a babe should be, is more tolerable than the foolish assumption of being what you clearly are not, in the business ranks of society.

I trust no woman construes my criticisms upon the inefficiency, the bad taste or the want of method in the habits of some, as a reflection upon all, or as in any sense an effort to discourage her. Not at all. I love women; and now that I have said it, I wonder if it strikes you as oddly and as strongly as the same avowal once struck me? It is not so very long ago that a stranger, a lady with whom I chanced to converse upon some topic affecting the in-

terests of our sex, expressed a desire to do something for a certain helpless class: for said she, "I love women!" I had so often found that women loved only men, and cared nothing for each other, that this sudden assertion of one woman quite startled me. There were two of us then, who cared as much about our own sex as the other?—who would stand by our own emergencies? No wonder I was startled!

For I see every day about me the evidences of an unreasoning devotion to men on the part of women; and can only bear with it patiently because I know it is the sin of ignorance, and unconscious obedience to custom. You have only to read the Police Court reports in the daily papers to learn to what an extent this servility of the lower classes of women is carried. These same women would not perjure themselves, very likely, for their own daughters; but the most brutal of men they will; and for other men to praise their devotion is reward enough. A story in the *Overland Monthly* for August, called a "Little Woman" is (I hope) a fictitious example of the same kind. As if there could be any glory in prostrating one's soul before a traitor and a criminal! But you do not have to go outside of your own circle of observation to find examples enough. It begins with the favoritism that teaches the girl of the family to wait upon and obey her brother; and it continues in the exculpation of the boy for faults that would bring the girl under severe criticism, if not punishment. It allows the young man to "sow wild oats" with hardly a protest; and the elder man to violate every sacred obligation with impunity. It makes mothers care for and support worthless sons, as they never would equally worthless daughters; and it causes the wives to drink the cup of sorrow and degradation to the lees, rather than break with their husbands. It may be argued that the pecuniary dependence of women upon men accounts for this in a large degree. Granting that, it does not account for all of it, nor for the fatuity with which women, peculiarly independent of men, still devote themselves to the most undeserving. It is the result of long ages of imperfect moral training and complete domination of intellect, together with physical dependence.

There is a poetic side even to such moral ignorance as this. Undying love and undying devotion are beautiful in themselves, and when applied to worthy objects become heroic. But a woman is hardly excusable, on the ground of these high virtues, for degrading herself. The virtues then become foul vices that no white-souled woman can countenance and retain her purity. And my doctrine is this: You must first be true to yourself before your devotion to another is morally of any consequence. A woman may not know how to handle her parasol gracefully, how to take leave seasonably, nor how a business transaction should be conducted; and on these merely conventional circumstances may fail to take rank with the *élite*. How, then, if such trifles are not patent everywhere, can it be expected that the nicer and weightier points of true morality and refined religion should be commonly understood?

I am aware that the gospel of gush encourages the association of the pure with the impure for the sinner's sake; but I do not believe in it. The old saying that "you cannot touch pitch without being defiled" is full of homely pertinency. The moment that you join hands, ever so lightly, with any unworthy person, that moment you lose more than the other gains. The late Brooklyn trial furnished sufficient evidence of this truth. Had the innocent party in that trial—if, indeed, there was an innocent party—totally refused from the first any partnership in the guilty secret with the other; had Mrs. Tilton refused to lie for her husband, or her husband refused to lie for her, as the case may be; had Moulton declined to be made the repository of