

CHARACTERLESS WOMEN.

BY MRS. REBA SMITH.

COLERIDGE has somewhere beautifully said, "the perfection of a woman's character is to be characterless." A sentiment of such obvious propriety would hardly seem to need a commentary, and yet no one of Coleridge's appears to be oftener misunderstood. A characterless woman is, assuredly, any thing but an imbecile one. She must be one equal to all contingencies, whose faculties or powers are developed by circumstances, rather than by spontaneous action; and this implies the possession of all that is peculiar to her sex, but all in harmonious adjustment.

A characterless woman is often confounded with one deficient in the finest attributes of the sex, who is characterless indeed, but is so from imbecility—if the phrase do not, of itself, involve a contradiction; as if a creature, whose virtues were all negatives, could be characterless! A woman, too feeble to grasp at thought, too vapid for sentiment, too tame for mirth, too commonplace for enthusiasm, and too weak for passion, may be the ideal of those incapable of appreciating the higher characteristics of womanhood, but could never have been that of him whom Wordsworth calls the "heaven-eyed creature;" of him who conceived Christabel, and the sweet attaching Genevieve.

Such may do for the statue-like creations of Maria Edgeworth, and the thousand and one other romance writers, who expect woman to move by rule—who mistake dullness for goodness, and apathy for grace; but they awaken in ourselves no emotions of sympathy, for the human heart can respond only to *human* emotions, and it at once goes forth to greet its kindred impulses. Fielding's Sophia is more lovable than Scott's Rowena, simply because one is a live, earnest woman, and the other designed to be a very perfect one, and she turns out to be a very dull one.

Let Rebecca pass—the noble—the ideal—for, alas! human hearts are not prepared for the love of such as these; they may excite esteem, admiration, even passion, but love—the crowning boon of existence—may not be theirs. They gather not the household gods about them—they enter themselves into the holiest of holies, but they minister alone at the altar. Their fate is that of the fabled bird, whose own intensity kindled its funeral pyre. They have a mission to perform. They are created not to enjoy but to suffer; aye, to suffer that human hearts may be made wiser and holier; therefore do the pale stars keep vigil with them, and therefore is the dew all night upon their heads, and their locks wet with the drops of the morning.

A characterless woman! We feel she must be so, to be perfect as a woman. But then she must have all the susceptibilities, all the sweet impulses, all the weaknesses of her sex; she must have a woman's thoughts, and a woman's utterance—her simplicity, her faith—and, beneath all, there must dwell that womanly endurance—wondrous and holy in its power—reserved for the day of trial.

Weakness as often imports character as strength. Any one attribute, in excess, imports a distinctive characteristic. We talk of vain women, coquettish, masculine, sensible, dull, witty, &c., running through all the defective grades of character. Now a true woman must, as circumstances warrant, exhibit something of all this; for she is a "creature of infinite variety."

She may have a dash of coquetry, but be no coquette—she hath pride, but may not be called proud—hath vanity, but is not vain—she suggests, rather than originates wit—wise she is, but, as Rosalind saith, "the wiser, the waywarder"—she is devout, but no devotee—she is good, but hers is not that dry, barren goodness, which ariseth from cold speculating reason, but is rather that of a beautiful instinct, that causeth her to feel that God hath done infinitely better for her than she could have done for herself. Like Desdemona, she will blush at the mention of herself, feeling she is so nicely balanced—and then, with a woman's best and sweetest attribute, she spreadeth forth her hand for support.

Let the crowning grace of womanhood be, that she is characterless. The beautiful and beloved of all ages may be thus defined. With all the queenly attributes of Isabella, of Spain, we feel she was all of woman. So was the lonely and unfortunate Mary Stuart, and she still holdeth a place in our hearts.

Joan, of Arc, Catharine de Medici, Mary and Elizabeth, of England, were all characters. We will not analyze them, nor the emotions they excite, but simply cite them as illustrations.

The meek sister of Lazarus—she who sat at the feet—the gentle Mary, who was most honored with the friendship of the Savior, whom he could not reproach, even though incited thereto by her sister, was beautiful in her womanhood—so was the mother of Jesus. A character is affixed to Martha, and to Mary the Magdalene. History is full of examples in support of our theory. Josephine was characterless, except in her sorrows; and too often do we find the lovely and beloved distinguished thus, and we weep with them, feeling we are beguiled, not challenged to sympathy. Mrs. Hemans, who hath

given such eloquent utterance to a woman's soul, must have embodied all the attributes of womanhood, and all in harmony.

Shakspeare everywhere discriminates between his characters and his true women, those that are to be a part of the drama of life as the actors, the women swayed by discordant passions, and those that appeal to our love. Never does he confound them. Those that are designed for our love are not characters. Whatever may be their dignity, their intellect, their fortunes, they are still women. The grace of womanhood invests all they say, and all they do. Such are Portia, Cordelia, Desdemona, Ophelia, Rosalind, &c. His characters may excite our admiration, our

mirth, or abhorrence, but they find no lodgement in our hearts. Such are Cressida, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Kate, &c.

Of Milton, Eve is characterless, till she hath fallen, and Spenser's Amoret sits in the very "lap of womanhood."

Need we call Byron's Medora weak, because she is supremely tender and feminine? Weakness creates eccentricities, and she had none. Gulnare hath character, and we recoil from her, as did the Corsair.

But enough—it is the "story without an end," to be read from the time that Eve first became a type of womanhood, down to the time when her sex shall realize all that of which she was prophetic.

TO A BELLE WHO IS NOT A BLUE BELLE.

BY MRS. E. F. ELLET.

FANNY, in vain you've thrown your net;

Your beau is disenchanted;

You said, how can I e'er forget?

That you no "Rymer" wanted.

And said you not, my saucy belle,

For all my genius rare,

Although you liked me passing well,

My "Hobbes" you could not bear?

You say a "Spenser" you admire,

And "Glover's" works delight in;

But should your eyes behold a "Prior"

Your wits away 't would frighten,

For why? you ne'er could bear a "Hood."

"Cotton" 's your detestation;

You place a "Locke" on what is "Good"

Nor give your "Cook" a ration.

You asked me t' other day to dine,

And if I'm not mistaken,

Told me—'t was when you "dropped the line"—

You knew not "Hogg" from "Bacon."

I brought you down a noble "Bird,"

My gift you did not praise;

And thought my "Blackwood," so I heard,

Was only fit to blaze!

Things hard as "Flint" and "Steele" you hate,

You wish no lore to learn;

Your "Pope" you excommunicate,

And laugh to find me "Sterne."

In rings and seals your "Goldsmith" 's fair,

You must confess, as could be;

And yet that "Livy" is, you swear,

No better than she should be!

"Moore" would I say to you! Ah me!

O'er "Little" you grow cold;

You say that "Lamb" should quartered be,

And "Young" you say is old.

Your "Johnson" you a "Walker" make,

So merciless your ravage;

Though Crusoe took such pains to take

You throw away—a "Savage."

For "Sparks" you will no pity show:

My love meets no returns;

Then why should still my bosom glow

For one who laughs at "Burns"?

Why to a belle who likes not "Home,"

Nor will my cares divide,

Should I a pensive suitor come,

And bear an "Akenside"?

SONG—"LOVE'S TIME IS NOW."

BY PARK BENJAMIN.

Oh, why delay the happy time,

The hours glide swiftly by,

And oft we see a sombre cloud

Obscure the fairest sky;

Then while the morn is rosy bright

Accept my earnest vow,

And oh, believe me, dearest maid,

Love's time, love's time is now.

Regard not, sweet, what graybeards tell

Of fond, impetuous youth,

But trust my faith and constancy,

And never doubt my truth—

I would not for the world dispel

The sunshine from thy brow;

Then be mine own this very day,

Love's time, love's time is now.

Ah, yes—'t is true! Love's time is now,

To-morrow may destroy

The flowers that bloom so fresh and fair

Along the path of joy:

Then do not, sweet, an hour delay

But at the altar bow,

And with consenting hearts we'll sing

Love's time, love's time is now.