

"A Lady's Ascent of the
Breithorn"

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tude and her eye beamed with admiration. But on one occasion she had nearly lost her. Playing one fine afternoon on the bank of the stream which drove the wheel belonging to the mill, her feet slipped, and she fell in. A man who happened to be a little in advance, had his eye drawn to an object on the water, which he at first took to be a quantity of loose hair; but another glance revealed to him the head of a little girl beneath the surface of the rapid stream. He ran and was just in time to lay hold of the hair as its possessor was falling over on to the wheel. Another moment, and Jane Ruddock (the drowning girl) would have been no more; in which case he who now pens these fragments of a strange history would not have been in existence—for that little girl became his mother.

I have little more to add. Isabella Pearson, who, as I have shewn, became Isabella Ruddock, wife of a common sailor, once more entered the matrimonial lists; but she neither improved her position nor increased her happiness by so doing. Indeed her life, while her second husband lived, was bittered by his love of strong drink. But she survived him. She was a widow the second time when she became familiar to my youthful eye. Many a merry hour have I spent in her company. Often I have heard her relate the incidents which make up this story. She was a fine, tall, handsome woman while health remained with her; she had also a large womanly heart, a hot impetuous temper, and a remarkable simplicity and honesty of character. She died in 1849, weighed down with years and infirmities; but she ended her eventful life in much patience and peace.

A LADY'S ASCENT OF THE BREITHORN.

FANCY the following tableau. Scene—Switzerland; time—August 1875, at a desolate rocky part of the Surenen Pass. A group—Youthful grace and vigour; manly strength and endurance, &c. Fore-ground—Four heads eagerly bent over a huge bowl of *café* placed on a board, which is extended over four laps. Hands belonging to said heads lading the mixture into their mouths with large wooden ladles with little curved handles, between convulsions of mirth. Background—The chalet of the Waldnacht Alp, from which the realistic artist should cause hideous odours to ascend in the form of dense vapour. At the door of it, the unwashed and scantily clad figure of a Swiss herdsman, fearful to behold, owner of chalet, and like Caliban himself, chattering an ominous jargon, and grinning at the English feeders. Right of background—Attendant guide, cheerful and pleased that he has at last secured some sustenance for his 'leddies, who have been walking from eight A.M. to four P.M., and will yet have to go on till three-quarters of an hour after midnight. These tableaux, with minor variations, were frequent in our tour.

After many adventures and many jokes, after being lost in a pass from eight o'clock to ten, when the sun had set, and having to wander about for those two hours on the edge of a precipice guiltless of path, being finally rescued by a heaven-sent and most unexpected peasant with a lamp—after these things and their results, which were blackened complexions, dried skins, and dilapidated costumes, we arrived at Zermatt, where we

settled down for a time. The object of the settling down was in one word—ascents.

Nothing much, according to the men, had yet been done, though we in our secret hearts hugged the proud thought that Pilatus had not defeated us, and that the Twelfth-cake-like snows of Titlis had been pressed by our tread; that the Aegghorn, though it had witnessed (N.B. at the end of a long day) the heat and perspiration which dimmed our few remaining charms, and had heard our smothered groans, had had in the end to feel our light weight upon its summit, and to bear us as we gazed with awe at its mighty circle of peaks. But what do these avail? In the eye of man they were mere preparation for mightier things.

After some debate, mingled with faint remembrance on our part, when Monte Rosa was mentioned, the *Breithorn* was decided upon; and the manly spirits, which had become depressed by a few days' lounge, arose. Such is the enigma Man! The day was fixed, an extra guide (one Franz Biener—known as Weisshorn Biener) engaged on the night before we went up to the Riffel. After a few hours' disturbed sleep we were awoke at two; and dragging our weary and daily emaciating bodies from the beds where they had not been too comfortable, we dressed by the flickering light of a candle; and as we dressed, my friend and I cast fearful looks out at the Matterhorn, which fiercely pierced the dark sky, and seemed to say to me in the words of the poet:

Beware the pine-tree's withered branch;
Beware the awful avalanche!

As I put the last finishing touches to my collar at the glass, my feminine pulses slightly quickened to the tune of—'This was the peasant's last good-night,' and though no voice far up the height replied 'Excelsior!' yet a voice came from outside which meant in downright English very much the same thing; and my reflections were quenched in the carousal down-stairs, which I hastened to join. An unfortunate and sleepy maid was ministering to the wants of my friends in the dimly lighted salon of the Riffel-haus. Outside, the guides were impatiently stamping about in the frosty night, and complaining of the length of our delay, insinuating that the sun would soon be up. The fact is the preparations of toilet on our part were complicated. The uninitiated may not know that the feminine clothing of the present time, elegant though some may think it, is not conducive to comfort in mountain climbing. A well-tied back *tablier* has a restrictive influence upon the free movement of the lower limbs, and only admits of a step of a certain length. In rock-work it is felt to be peculiarly irksome, and in soft snow it is trying to the temper.

Let the imaginative reader then, if he be able, picture two young women devoid of tabliers, and so at once removed from the pale of polite society. I tremble as I write with the fear that this avowal may remove from me and my companion that feminine sympathy so dear to our hearts. But I must descend a step lower. Freedom from tablier was not sufficiently radical. Our skirts must be carefully pinned up round our waists à la washer-woman, so that our progress be perfectly unimpeded; and armed with masks and spectacles we sallied forth into the darkness—a party of six. I shall not easily forget the delicious exhilaration

we felt as we hastened along towards the Gormer Glacier. The dark cold air touched our faces crisply, and feelingly persuaded us of the advantage of the sun's absence.

The searching sensation of being about to commit a crime, attendant on nocturnal adventures, clung to us, and we were filled with a vague remorse, in which we felt at one with Eugene Aram. At the same time the ridiculousness of our position soon wrought upon us to such a degree that we profaned that wonderful silence with unholy bursts of laughter. Our festivity ceased when we reached the glacier, for there we broke up into line, we ladies being tenderly taken possession of each by a guide, who soon got us over a rough moraine. The glacier we found unpleasantly slippery; and it was exciting work, as at the point where we crossed it was very much crevassed, and steps had often to be cut. The mails on our marvellous boots answered admirably, and we sprang about with great sure-footedness and with exquisite enjoyment.

The leader of our party was in a rather dangerous plight, for he had had no nails put into his boots, and we felt quite anxious as through the dim light we noticed his uncertain movements. How he got across with the ice in so bad a condition, is a marvel! We had been on the glacier about an hour when the light began to creep up over the mountains, and we were in the midst of a scene of wonderful beauty. The Monte Rosa, the Lyskam, Castor and Pollux, the Breithorn, the Mastehorn, and many another shrouded in their utter whiteness stood round us in awful calm, closing us in upon a lake of tossed and heaving ice. The moonlight which streamed down upon us on one side, and the pale yellow light of the dawn on the other, lit up the scene with a weirdness which seemed not of our world. We saw each other's phantom-like figures gliding about, and felt that we were too real to be there—a place where only ghosts had any right to be. The feeling that pressed upon me was that I had suddenly intruded into nature's holiest of holies. It seemed as if some secret of a higher life than this was being sighed through the air, and that I, with all my earth-stains on me, could not rise to the understanding of that secret. Yet on that early morning in August, in the same world far away, the same London was going on in the same old way we knew so well. Cats were even then stealing along suburban walls; cocks were beginning to practise their crescendos, tired-out citizens were tossing in oppressive four-posters, dreaming tantalising dreams of cool sea-breezes not for them; while round all must be clinging that heavy breathed-out air, which of itself is a very *mythero* in contrast with the mountain ether.

By the time we had reached the upper plateau of the St Theodule glacier, it was light, and we were all roped together. The process of roping in this enlightened age I feel it to be unnecessary to describe. Thus we marched along that profound and frozen solitude tied together in a long line. The snow was as hard as a road, and the cold intense. Biener is an excellent guide, but his pace is very slow, and thus we got rather benumbed. We had, however, passed the Little Matterhorn on our left, and the Theodule-horn on our right, with the little rude *cabane* erected on the rocks at its foot—more than eleven

thousand feet above the sea, and the highest habitation in Europe—and we were beginning to trail our snake-like length up the snow-slopes on the west and south of the mountain, when my friend became so unmistakably ill that we came at once to a halt and a consultation. She (to her honour) much wished to go on, in spite of sickness, giddiness, faintness, and a livid complexion; but as that was out of the question, she was unted from the rope, and sent back with our ordinary guide (a first-rate fellow, one Johann von Ay) to the hut already mentioned.

When we reached the actual snow-fields of the Breithorn, I had to learn that the work of my day had scarcely begun. As the sun rose, the snow began to get very soft, and instead of going in to my knees, as I had expected, I literally waded in it up to my waist. With mighty efforts I lifted up my already wearied legs and plunged them into ever fresh pits of snow, where they frequently became so firmly imbedded that, struggle as I might, I could not move; and presented to the spectator the hapless object of half a woman masked and speckled, striving and panting. From an æsthetic point of view I cannot say I felt myself a success; but from a moral point, I felt myself a very finger-post through the ages. Truly I had given up my all in the shape of appearance, and had offered myself up on that altar of adventure on which so many braves of my country have been sacrificed. The mode of rescue from the uncomfortable position indicated above was almost as bad as the plight itself. I feebly kicked; you can't kick boldly with your legs in tight pits; and the guide dragged at the rope which bound my waist, and then out I came like the cork out of a bottle. Two hours and a half of this sort of thing went on, varied by refreshments and occasional rests for breath-taking, but still it appeared to me that we were always at the same spot, and ever the glittering summit from afar mocked my helpless gasps. At last (ah! what an at last!) the final slope—really the final one—stretched right up before us. A party of men who were engaged in scientific experiments peered over at us; and with one last desperate effort I found myself landed amongst them at the top of the Breithorn, and thirteen thousand seven hundred feet above the sea. As we placed our feet upon the summit we growled the groan of triumph, and gazed with awe around us upon the inexpressibly magnificent scene which spread itself out before us. A mighty circle of mountains stood in awful calm around us. Every fantastic line, every curious heaping, every wild wreck, every gleaming curve of glacier possible to mountains, seemed gathered together before us. Each peak had a proud originality of its own, which shewed through all the sameness of the uniform whiteness. But the spirit of these places is the most wonderful thing about them. The clamour, the struggle, the unrest, which make up to most of us the atmosphere of this world, seemed in these regions to have been left behind in a past state; and this in a way was illustrated by the scene itself. The contorted forms and tossed rocks spoke of struggle, gradual it may be, but still struggle. But in the serenity surrounding those unearthly peaks there was a peace which seemed to have left struggle far behind—the repose of a wide knowledge gained only through sore fight and aspiration.

A short time of peaceful dream was allowed me, and that was rather marred by the intense glare of the light, and then we began the descent. In an evil moment of rest some little way down, I left hold of my alpenstock and leaned it against my shoulder. In a moment it was gone—down, down, sliding skitchishly away, till my heart was pained by its final leap into a crevasse far away. As I looked, I imagined what a crash my skull would have come at the bottom of that crevasse. I afterwards found out that the alpenstock was not my own, as I then thought, but that I had inadvertently changed with one of our guides. Imagine my grief at the thought that I had lost the dear companion of my travels, that staff which had guided my wavering feet and upheld my tottering body through passes and up mountains, and which I intended to preserve until my death! My situation without it was rather perilous, and would have been more so had not the snow been very soft. But the guide took me entirely in charge, and lent me his axe, which I was certain I should recklessly lose after the same fashion. After a weary time, Biener the guide decided to *glissade* me. I was resigned. What else could I be? By that time I was very resigned. He took off his coat, and made me sit down upon it, then tied my skirts around me. A rope was attached by Biener in front, and the other by my gentlemen friends behind. Then ensued a process in which my limbs were nearly severed from the body, and in which I suffered greatly. Biener rushed down the slope dragging me behind him; while the gentlemen, unaccustomed to this sort of thing, and not being able to go fast enough, hung a good part of their weight on to the rope behind, and so almost bisected me. I never expected to be an individual whole again; halves were my fate. Never was creature in so miserable a plight. No Procrustean bed could have produced greater tortures than those I suffered as I sped down that miserable slope. I shouted all the French I could think of to Biener to stop him, and rid me from the hideous rope, which cut me like a knife; but the air would not carry my words, and on I skimmed and floundered. At last he heard my cries, and released me from the fetters. The fact was that the gentlemen were quite unable to keep up with Biener in the deep snow, with the dismal result, as seen above, of almost cutting through my waist. The lesson to be deduced from this is the simple maxim I commend to all my feminine readers: *Never*, under the most favourable circumstances, *glissade*.

When we reached the cabane where my friend was waiting for us, we were met by Johann, who told us with a long-face that the 'laddy' would not eat anything, and was very sick. We found, to our sorrow, that she had been in a miserable condition all day, and had suffered dreadfully from mountain sickness. She was so ill that it was impossible she could walk, and we were a long time in deciding what was to be done. Now, a helpless invalid, at a height of over eleven thousand feet above the sea, is not a being easy to legislate for. At last a litter was contrived. A chair was placed on some alpenstocks; and an American gentleman whom we met at the cabane being kind enough to lend us his porter, we found hands enough to carry her part of the

way at least, to Zermatt; the Riffel-haus, where we were staying, being out of the question, on account of the Gorner glacier and its moraines and rocks, which would have to be passed to get there. Our party, sad to say, had then to separate, two of us going to Zermatt and two to the Riffel. The melancholy *chaise-d-porteur* procession wended its way to Zermatt; and with considerably damped spirits we went on to the Riffel, which we reached at about half-past six p.m. The ambulance party did not get to their destination till eight o'clock.

All that remains now to be told of this our adventure is the sad result. The next morning, on waking from sleep, I found that my ear adhered to the pillow; and when, with much trembling I approached the glass, a spectacle presented itself to me which I can never forget. As I gazed at the grotesque reflection of myself, I inwardly vowed that no mask of London make, elegantly worked as it might be, should ever cover my face again. A large flapping cover-all mask 'of the country' let me recommend to ladies who go up snow mountains. I was swollen; I was black; I was hideous! Half of the skin of one ear was hanging by a shred, and the ear itself was a blister; while all round my neck from ear to ear was a chain of blisters. Their state was so bad that the dressing of them by one of our party (a doctor) took half an hour, and I could scarcely turn my head. It required a good deal of courage to face *table-d'hôte* and the young ladies who were indulging in complexions and large portmanteaus. But I did! Would that I could say I enjoyed it. I did *not* enjoy it. The complexions of the scornful and the scorn itself, embittered that meal, usually attended with such joys. In my travelling afterwards, I became accustomed to the searching glance at my poor tattered skin and to the remark: 'I see you have been doing glacier-work.' And it was not until a month of English life had to some extent repaired me that I could look back with delight and triumph to the ascent of the Breithorn.

ECCENTRIC PEOPLE.

MR. TRUBS, in his book upon *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities*, introduces us to a collection of funny people, with whom it is good company to pass an hour. To get away from the dull routine of conventionality for a while is at all times a relief, more especially when we fill the interval by watching some of our eccentric fellow-creatures who are good enough to divert us by their antics. Some are serious in their folly; some are mad; some we admire, while others again awake our pity; but one and all they are gifted with a force of will that merits attention.

A collection of dead-and-gone eccentrics now pass before us, recalling a few living ones that we know of, whose collected vagaries, if published, may in turn probably amuse our grandchildren. First, let us look at Beckford, a name not much remembered now, although it belonged to a man who was a marvel in his day. Gifted with extraordinary powers of mind and will, he did everything by turns, and nothing long. He wrote a book that created a sensation. No great marvel that, to people of our day, when the difficulty is to find

some one who has not written a book ; but Beckford wrote as no other author. *Vathek* was written at one sitting ! It took him three days and two nights of hard labour, during which time he never undressed. We know of one instance somewhat similar. A reigning lady novelist told us once that she was pledged to her publisher to send him a three-volume novel by a certain date. Two days previous to the expiration of her contract, her novel had only reached the opening chapter of the third volume. On the evening of the first day she went to a ball, danced all night, returning home at the small-hours of morning, when, after taking off her ball-dress, and drinking some strong tea, she sat down to finish her task. All that day she wrote and on into the next night, never leaving her desk until she had written *fois*; when with trembling hands she despatched her manuscript in time to fulfil her engagement.

There are some natures that need the pressure of necessity, or self-imposed necessity, to goad them into action ; their resolution once formed, no obstacle is suffered to come between them and its fulfilment. Beckford was one of these. He determined to build a house—the abbey at Fonthill, where he resided for twenty years—and swore by his favourite St Anthony that his Christmas-dinner should be cooked in the abbey kitchen. Christmas approached, and the kitchen was in an unfinished condition. Every exertion that money could command was brought to the task, and Christmas morning saw the kitchen finished and the cooks installed. A splendid repast was prepared, and the dinner actually cooked, when lo ! and behold, as the servants were carrying in the dishes through the long passages into the dining-room, a loud noise was heard, and the kitchen fell through with a crash ! But what cared Beckford ? He was rich ; he could afford to build his kitchen over again ; meantime he had humoured his whim and kept his vow to St Anthony ; and we may add, made good his title to eccentricity, for which we applaud him, and pass on to watch some others.

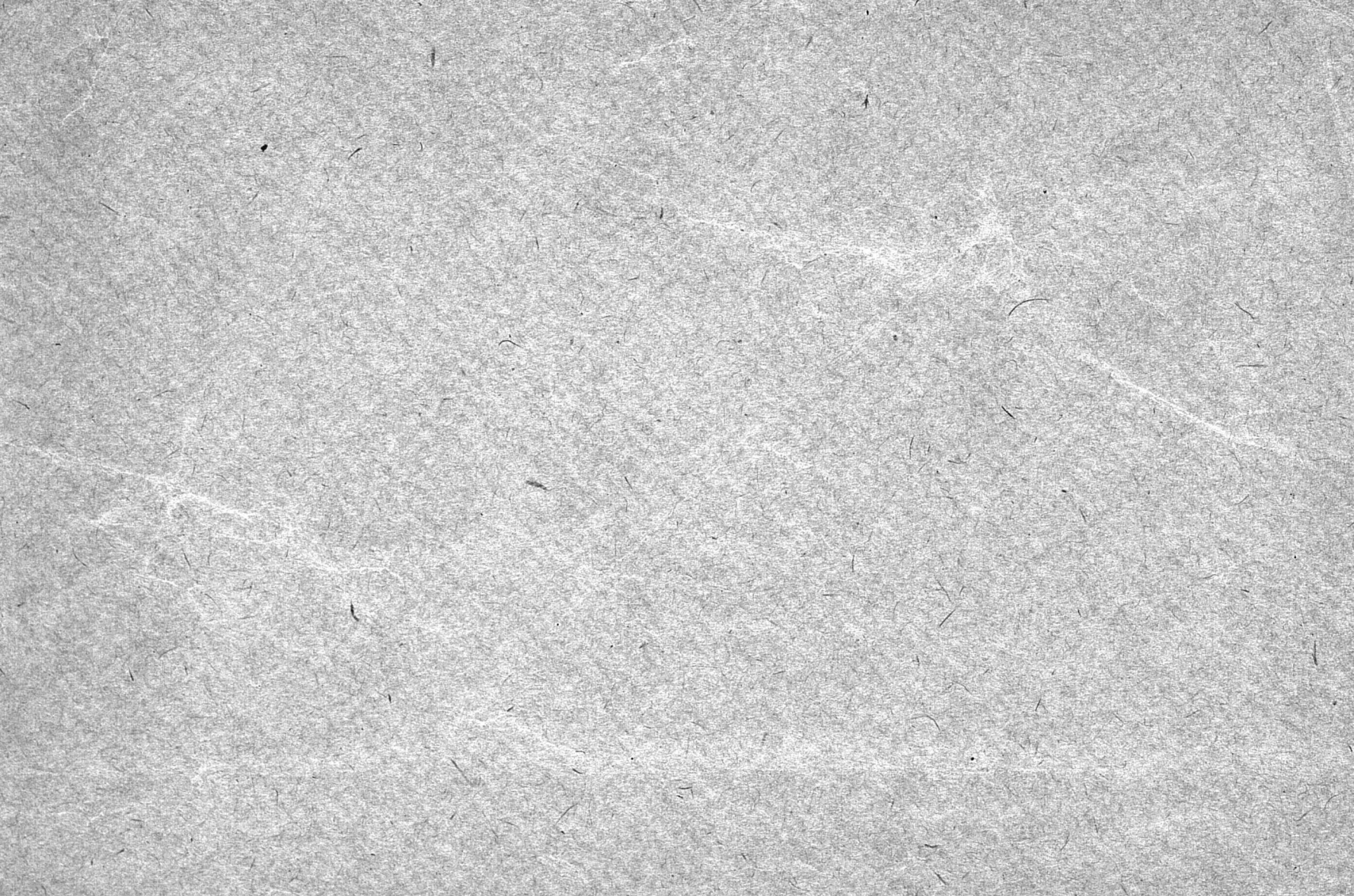
What sorry figure is this that comes next ? A poor neglected imbecile, living in squalid lodgings at Calais. It is scarcely possible to recognise in this unhappy being the once gay and elegant Beau Brummel, the glass of fashion and mould of form to the men and women of his generation, whom he ruled with the despotism of an autocrat. Yet this is the poor Beau and no other. He is holding a phantom reception. Having desired his attendant to arrange his apartment, set out the whist-tables, and light the candles—alas ! only tallow—he is ready at eight o'clock to receive the guests, which the servant, previously instructed, now announces. First comes the Duchess of Devonshire. On hearing her name the Beau leaves his chair, and with the courtliest bow, the only reminiscence of his departed glory, he advances to the door and greets the phantom Duchess with all the honour that he would have given the beautiful Georgiana. He takes her hand and leads her to a seat, saying as he does so : ' Ah, my dear Duchess,

how rejoiced I am to see you ; so very amiable of you to come at this short notice. Pray bury yourself in this arm-chair. Do you know it was the gift to me of the Duchess of York, who was a very kind friend of mine ; but poor thing, you know, she is no more !' At this point tears of idioty would fall from his eyes, and he would sink into the arm-chair himself, awaiting the arrival of other guests, who, being duly announced, were similarly greeted. With these ghosts of the past he would spend the evening until ten o'clock, when the servant telling each guest that his or her carriage was waiting, would carry his poor old master off to bed. We cannot wish him good-night without the payment of a sigh for the pantomime he has acted and the sad lesson it conveys.

And now we conjure up a droll figure, whose eccentricity borders on madness, the spendthrift squire of Halston, John Myrton. He is tormented with hiccup, and tries the novel cure of setting fire to himself in order to frighten it away. Applying a candle to his garment, being sparsely clad at the time, he is soon in flames. His life is only saved by the active exertions of some people who chance to be in the way at the time. He invites some friends once, and when the company are assembled in the drawing-room, he startles them all by riding into the room on a bear ! The guests are panic-stricken : one mounts on a table, another on a chair ; they all strive to make their escape from the ungacious animal, and its still more savage master, who is enjoying the misery of his guests with the laugh of a madman. Let us too leave him.

Ladies have a great field for the display of eccentricity, in their mode of costume. We know of one lady who has never altered her style of dress since she was eighteen. The consequence is that every ten years or so the fashions come round to her, and for a brief period she is *à la mode*. Never having made any concessions to the abominations of crinoline or false hair, she is at the present time more orthodox than she appeared five years ago. Every time has had its eccentricities in this respect, and Mr Timbs shews us a certain Miss Banks, who died in 1819, and in plain terms looked a 'regular guy.' She was a lady of good position, being the sister of Sir Joseph Banks. Her costume consisted of a Barcelona quilted petticoat, which had a hole on each side, for the convenience of rummaging two immense pockets stuffed with books of all sizes, which did not add to the symmetry of her already large proportions. In this guise she went about, followed by a footman carrying a cane, as tall as his mistress, or her luggage when accompanying her on a journey. She was the originator of the words *Eighteen*, *Twenty*, and *Scrawl*, which so many ladies are fond of applying in the order of precedence to their wearing apparel. These words Miss Banks invented to distinguish three dresses she had made for herself at the same time, and all alike ; the first for best, the second for occasional, and the third for daily wear.

While on feminine eccentricities we must record some that we have met with in our own day. So convinced is one elderly married lady of the peculiar propensities of all lodging-house meals, that after each meal a curious scene takes place in her room. Every article, such as her tea-caddy, sugar-basin, jam-pot, &c., which she has had occasion to use during the meal, is placed on the table,



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