

taken the train at one of our great industrial centres, for instance,—young persons of the female sex, we will say, who have bustled in full-dressed, engaged in loud strident speech, and who, after free discussion, have fixed on two or more double seats, which having secured, they proceed to eat apples and hand round daguerreotypes,—I say, I think the conversational soprano, heard under these circumstances, would not be among the allurements the old enemy would put in requisition, were he getting up a new temptation of St. Anthony.

There are sweet voices among us, we all know, and voices not musical, it may be, to those who hear them for the first time, yet sweeter to us than any we shall hear until we listen to some warbling angel in the overture to that eternity of blissful harmonies we hope to enjoy. But why should I tell lies? If my friends love me, it is because I try to tell the truth. I never heard but two voices in my life that frightened me by their sweetness.

—Frightened you?—said the schoolmistress.—Yes, frightened me. They made me feel as if there might be constituted a creature with such a chord in her voice to some string in another's soul, that, if she but spoke, he would leave all and follow her, though it were into the jaws of Erebus. Our only chance to keep our wits is, that there are so few natural chords between others' voices, and this string in our souls, and that those which at first may have jarred a little by and by come into harmony with it.—But I tell you this is no fiction. You may call the story of Ulysses and the Sirens a fable, but

what will you say to Mario and the poor lady who followed him?

Whose were those two voices that bewitched me so? They both belonged to German women. One was a chambermaid, not otherwise fascinating. The key of my room at a certain great hotel was missing, and this Teutonic maiden was summoned to give information respecting it. The simple soul was evidently not long from her mother-land, and spoke with sweet uncertainty of dialect. But to hear her wonder, and lament and suggest, with soft, liquid inflexions, and low, sad murmurs, in tones as full of serious tenderness for the fate of the lost key as if it had been a child that had strayed from its mother, was so winning, that, had her features and figure been as delicious as her accents,—if she had looked like the marble Clytie, for instance—why, all I can say is —

(The schoolmistress opened her eyes so wide, that I stopped short.)

I was only going to say that I should have drowned myself. For Lake Erie was close by, and it is so much better to accept asphyxia, which takes only three minutes by the watch, than a *mesalliance*, that lasts fifty years to begin with, and then passes along down the line of descent, (breaking out in all manner of boorish manifestations of feature and manner, which, if men were only as short-lived as horses, could be readily traced back through the square-roots, and the cube-roots of the family stem, on which you have hung the armorial bearing of the De Champignons or the De la Morues, until one

came to beings that ate with knives and said, "Haow!") that no person of right feeling could have hesitated for a single moment.

The second of the ravishing voices I have heard was, as I have said, that of another German woman. I suppose I shall ruin myself by saying that such a voice could not have come from any Americanized human being.

What was there in it? said the schoolmistress, —and, upon my word, her tones were so very musical, that I almost wished I had said three voices instead of two, and not made the unpatriotic remark above reported. Oh, I said, it had so much *woman* in it,—*muliebrity*, as well as *femininity*;—no self-assertion, such as free suffrage introduces into every word and movement; large, vigorous nature, running back to those huge-limbed Germans of Tacitus, but subdued by the reverential training and tuned by the kindly culture of fifty generations. Sharp business habits, a lean soil, independence, enterprise, and east winds, are not the best things for the larynx. Still, you hear noble voices among us,—I have known families famous for them,—but ask the first person you meet a question, and ten to one there is a hard, sharp, metallic, matter-of-fact business clink in the accents of the answer, that produces the effect of one of those bells which small trades-people connect with their shop-doors, and which spring upon your ear with such vivacity, as you enter, that your first impulse is to retire at once from the precincts.

—Ah, but I must not forget that dear little child I saw and heard in a French hospital.

Between two and three years old. Fell out of her chair and snapped both thigh-bones. Lying in bed, patient, gentle. Rough students round her, some in white aprons, looking fearfully business-like; but the child placid, perfectly still. I spoke to her, and the blessed little creature answered me in a voice of such heavenly sweetness, with that ready thrill in it which you have heard in the thrush's even-song, that I hear it at this moment, while I am writing, so many, many years afterwards.—*C'est tout comme un serin*, said the French student at my side.

These are the voices which struck the keynote of my conceptions as to what the sounds we are to hear in heaven will be, if we shall enter through one of the twelve gates of pearl. There must be other things besides aerolites that wander from their own spheres to ours; and when we speak of celestial sweetness or beauty, we may be nearer the literal truth than we dream. If mankind generally are the shipwrecked survivors of some pre-Adamitic cataclysm, set adrift in these little open boats of humanity to make one more trial to reach the shore,—as some grave theologians have maintained,—if, in plain English, men are the ghosts of dead devils who have "died into life" (to borrow an expression from Keats) and walk the earth in a suit of living rags that lasts three or four score summers,—why, there must have been a few good spirits sent to keep them company, and these sweet voices I speak of must belong to them.

I wish you could hear my sister's voice—said the schoolmistress.

If it is like yours, it must be a pleasant one,—said I.

I never thought mine was anything,—said the schoolmistress.

How should you know?—said I.—People never hear their own voices,—any more than they see their own faces. There is not even a looking glass for the voice. Of course, there is something audible to us when we speak; but that something is not our own voice as it is known to all our acquaintances. I think, if an image spoke to us in our own tones, we should not know them in the least.—How pleasant it would be, if in another state of being we could have shapes like our former selves for playthings,—we standing outside or inside of them as we liked, and they being to us just what we used to be to others.

I wonder if there will be nothing like what we call “play” after our earthly toys are broken,—said the schoolmistress.

Hush,—said I,—what will the divinity-student say?

(I thought she was hit, that time;—but the shot must have gone over her, or on one side of her; she did not flinch.

Oh,—said the schoolmistress—he must look out for my sister’s heresies; I am afraid he will be too busy with them to take care of mine.

Do you mean to say—said I—that it is *your sister* whom that student—

(The young fellow commonly known as John, who had been sitting on the barrel, smoking, jumped off just then, kicked over the barrel, gave it a push with his foot that set it rolling, and

stuck his saucy-looking face in at the window so as to cut my question off in the middle; and the schoolmistress leaving the room a few minutes afterwards, I did not have a chance to finish it.

The young fellow came in and sat down in a chair, putting his heels on the top of another.

Pooty girl,—said he.

A fine young lady,—I replied.

Keeps a fust-rate school, according to accounts,—said he,—teaches all sorts of things,—Latin and Italian and music. Folks rich once,—smashed up. She went right ahead as smart as if she’d been born to work. That’s the kind of girl I go for. I’d marry her, only two or three other girls would drown themselves if I did.

I think the above is the longest speech of this young fellow’s which I have put on record. I do not like to change his peculiar expressions, for this is one of those cases in which the style is the man, as M. de Buffon says. The fact is, the young fellow is a good-hearted creature enough, only too fond of his jokes,—and if it were not for those heat-lightning winks on one side of his face, I should not mind his fun much.]

(Some days after this, when the company were together again, I talked a little.)

I don’t think I have a genuine hatred for anybody. I am well aware that I differ herein from the sturdy English moralist and the stout American tragedian. I don’t deny that I hate *the sight* of certain people; but the qualities which make me tend to hate the man himself are such as I am so much disposed to pity. that, except under immediate aggravation, I feel kindly enough to

the worst of them. It is such a sad thing to be born a sneaking fellow, so much worse than to inherit a hump-back or a couple of club-feet, that I sometimes feel as if we ought to love the crippled souls, if I may use this expression, with a certain tenderness which we need not waste on noble natures. One who is born with such congenital incapacity that nothing can make a gentleman of him is entitled, not to our wrath, but to our profoundest sympathy. But as we cannot help hating the sight of these people, just as we do that of physical deformities, we gradually eliminate them from our society,—we love them, but open the window and let them go. By the time decent people reach middle age they have weeded their circle pretty well of these unfortunates, unless they have a taste for such animals; in which case, no matter what their position may be, there is something, you may be sure, in their natures akin to that of their wretched parasites.

The divinity student wished to know what I thought of affinities, as well as of antipathies; did I believe in love at first sight.

Sir, said I, all men love all women. That is the *prima-facie* aspect of the case. The Court of Nature assumes the law to be, that all men do so; and the individual man is bound to show cause why he does not love any particular woman. A man, says one of my old black-letter law-books, may show divers good reasons, as thus: He hath not seen the person named in the indictment; she is of tender age, or the reverse of that; she hath certain personal disqualifications,—as, for instance, she is a blackamoor, or hath

an ill-favored countenance; or, his capacity of loving being limited, his affections are engrossed by a previous comer; and so of other conditions. Not the less is it true that he is bound by duty and inclined by nature to love each and every woman. Therefore it is that each woman virtually summons every man to show cause why he doth not love her. This is not by written document, or direct speech, for the most part, but by certain signs of silk, gold, and other materials, which say to all men,—Look on me and love, as in duty bound. Then the man pleadeth his special incapacity, whatsoever that may be,—as, for instance, impecuniosity, or that he hath one or many wives in his household, or that he is of mean figure, or small capacity; of which reasons it may be noted, that the first is, according to late decisions, of chiefest authority. So far the old law-book. But there is a note from an older authority, saying that every woman doth love each and every man, except there be some good reason to the contrary; and a very observing friend of mine, a young unmarried clergyman, tells me, that, so far as his experience goes, he has reason to think the ancient author had fact to justify his statement.

I'll tell you how it is with the pictures of women we fall in love with at first sight.

We ain't talking about pictures,—said the landlady's daughter,—we're talking about women.

I understood that we were speaking of love at sight, I remarked, mildly. Now, as all a man knows about a woman whom he looks at is just what a picture as big as a copper, or a "nickel," rather, at the bottom of his eye can

teach him, I think I am right in saying we are talking about the pictures of women. Well, now, the reason why a man is not desperately in love with ten thousand women at once is just that which prevents all our portraits being distinctly seen upon that wall. They all *are* painted there by reflection from our faces, but because *all* of them are painted on each spot, and each on the same surface, and many other objects at the same time, no one is seen as a picture. But darken a chamber and let a single pencil of rays in through a key-hole, then you have a picture on the wall. We never fall in love with a woman in distinction from women, until we can get an image of her through a pin-hole; and then we can see nothing else, and nobody but ourselves can see the image in our mental camera-obscura.

My friend, the Poet, tells me he has to leave town whenever the anniversaries come round.

What's the difficulty? Why, they all want him to get up and make speeches, or songs, or toasts; which is just the very thing he doesn't want to do. He is an old story, he says, and hates to show off on these occasions. But they tease him, and coax him, and can't do without him, and feel all over his poor weak head until they get their fingers on the *fontanelle* (the Professor will tell you what this means,—he says the one at the top of the head always remains open in poets), until, by gentle pressure on that soft pulsating spot, they stupefy him to the point of acquiescence.

There are times, though, he says, when it is a pleasure, before going to some agreeable

meeting, to rush out into one's garden and clutch up a handful of what grows there,—weeds and violets together,—not cutting them off, but pulling them up by the roots with the brown earth they grow in sticking to them. That's his idea of a post-prandial performance. Look here, now. These verses I am going to read you, he tells me, were pulled up by the roots just in that way, the other day.—Beautiful entertainment,—names there on the plates that flow from all English-speaking tongues as familiarly as *and* or *the*; entertainers known wherever good poetry and fair title-pages are held in esteem; guest a kind-hearted, modest, genial, hopeful poet, who sings to the hearts of his countrymen, the British people, the songs of good cheer which the better days to come, as all honest souls trust and believe, will turn into the prose of common life. My friend, the Poet, says you must not read such a string of verses too literally. If he trimmed it nicely below, you wouldn't see the roots, he says, and he likes to keep them, and a little of the soil clinging to them.

This is the farewell my friend, the Poet, read to his and our friend, the Professor:—

#### A GOOD TIME GOING '.

Brave singer of the coming time,  
 Sweet minstrel of the joyous present,  
 Crowned with the noblest wreath of rhyme,  
 The holly-leaf of Ayrshire's peasant.  
 Good-bye ! Good-bye !—Our hearts and hand  
 Our lips in honest Saxon phrases,  
 Cry, God be with him, till he stands  
 His feet among the English daisies !