

last obsequies, cannot fail to have their due effect upon the fashionable world; and, through them, the middle classes, who are so disposed to imitate them in all things, will in course of time benefit by their example. There is also, we believe, a growing disposition on the part of the people at large to avoid the unmeaning displays we refer to; and it only needs the repeated and decided expression of public opinion to secure a large measure of beneficial reform in this direction.

Societies have already been established in the United States, the members of which undertake to disuse mourning themselves, and to discountenance the use of it by others. It is only, perhaps, by association and the power of numbers that this reform is to be accomplished; for individuals here and there could scarcely be expected to make way against the deeply rooted prejudices of the community at large.



CHAPTER XIII.

GREAT DEBTORS.

"What would life be without arithmetic, but a scene of horrors. You are going to Boulogne, the city of debts, peopled by men who never understood arithmetic."—SYDNEY SMITH.

"Quand on doit et qu'on ne paye pas, c'est comme si on ne devait pas."—ARSENE HOUSSAYE.

"Of what a hideous progeny is debt the father! What lies, what meanness, what invasions on self-respect, what cares, what double-dealing! How, in due season it will carve the frank, open face into wrinkles; how, like a knife, it will stab the honest heart."—DOUGLAS JERROLD.

"The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, *the men who borrow and the men who lend*. To these two original diversities may be reduced all those impertinent classifications of Gothic and Celtic tribes, white men, black men, red men, and such-like."—CHARLES LAMB.

PEOPLE do not know what troubles they are brewing for themselves when they run in debt. It does not matter for what the debt is incurred. It hangs like a millstone round a man's neck until he is relieved of it. It presses like a nightmare upon him. It hinders the well-being of his family. It destroys the happiness of his household.

Even those who are in the regular receipt of large incomes feel crippled, often for years, by the incubus of debt. Weighed down by this, what can a man do to save—to economize with a view to the future of his wife and children? A man in debt is disabled from insuring his life, from insuring his house and goods, from putting money in the bank, from buying a house or a freehold. All his surplus gains must go toward the payment of his debt.

Even men of enormous property, great lords with vast landed estates, often feel themselves oppressed and made miserable by loads of debt. They or their forefathers having contracted extravagant habits—a taste for gambling, horse-racing, or expensive living—borrow money on their estates, and the burden of debt remains. Not, perhaps, in the case of strictly entailed estates—for the aristocracy have contrived so that their debts shall be wiped out at their death, and they can thus gratify their spendthrift tastes at the expense of the public—the estates going comparatively unburdened to the entailed heir. But comparatively few are in the position of the privileged classes. In the case of the majority, the debts are inherited with the estates and often the debts are more than the estates are worth. Thus it happens that a large part of the lands of England are at this moment the property of mortgagees and money-lenders.

The greatest men have been in debt. It has even been alleged that greatness and debt have a certain relation to each other. Great men have great debts; they are trusted. So have great nations; they are respectable and have credit. Spiritless men have no debts, neither have spiritless nations; nobody will trust them. Men as well as nations in debt secure a widely extended interest. Their names are written in many books; and many are the conjectures formed as to whether they will pay—or not. The man who has no debts slips through the world comparatively unnoticed; while he who is in every body's books has all eyes fixed upon him. His health is inquired after with interest; and if he goes into foreign countries, his return is anxiously looked for.

The creditor is usually depicted as a severe man, with a hard visage; while the debtor is an open-hand-

ed, generous man, ready to help and entertain every body. He is the object of general sympathy. When Goldsmith was dunned for his milk-score and arrested for the rent of his apartments, who would think of pitying the milk-woman or the landlady? It is the man in debt who is the prominent feature of the piece, and all our sympathy is reserved for him. "What were you," asked Pantagruel of Panurge, "without your debts? God preserved me from ever being without them! Do you think there is any thing divine in lending or in crediting others? No! To owe is the true heroic virtue!"

Yet, whatever may be said in praise of debt, it has unquestionably a very seedy side. The man in debt is driven to resort to many sorry expedients to live. He is the victim of duns and sheriff's officers. Few can treat them with the indifference that Sheridan did, who put them into livery to wait upon his guests. The debtor starts and grows pale at every knock at his door. His friends grow cool, and his relatives shun him. He is ashamed to go abroad, and has no comfort at home. He becomes crabbed, morose, and querulous, losing all pleasure in life. He wants the passport to enjoyment and respect—money; he has only his debts, and these make him suspected, despised, and snubbed. He lives in the Slough of Despond. He feels degraded in others' eyes as well as in his own. He must submit to impertinent demands, which he can only put off by sham excuses. He has ceased to be his own master, and has lost the independent bearing of a man. He seeks to excite pity, and pleads for time. A sharp attorney pounces on him, and suddenly he feels himself in the vulture's gripe. He tries a friend or a relative. but all that he obtains is a civil leer, and a cool repulse. He tries a money-lender; and, if he succeeds,

he is only out of the frying-pan into the fire. It is easy to see what the end will be—a life of mean shifts and expedients, perhaps ending in the jail or the work-house.

Can a man keep out of debt? Is there a possibility of avoiding the moral degradation which accompanies it? Could not debt be dispensed with altogether, and man's independence preserved secure? There is only one way of doing this; by "living within the means." Unhappily, this is too little the practice in modern times. We incur debt, trusting to the future for the opportunity of defraying it. We cannot resist the temptation to spend money. One will have fine furniture and live in a high-rented house; another will have wines and a box at the opera; a third must give dinners and music-parties—all good things in their way, but not to be indulged in if they can not be paid for. Is it not a shabby thing to pretend to give dinners, if the real parties who provide them are the butcher, the poulterer, and the wine-merchant, whom you are in debt to, and can not pay?

A man has no business to live in a style which his income can not support, or to mortgage his earnings of next week or of next year, in order to live luxuriously to-day. The whole system of debt, by means of which we forestall and anticipate the future, is wrong. They are almost as much to blame who give credit, and encourage customers to take credit, as those are who incur debts. A man knows what his actual position is if he pays his way as he goes. He can keep within his means, and so apportion his expenditure as to reserve a fund of savings against a time of need. He is always balanced up; and if he buys nothing but what he pays for in cash, he cannot fail to be on the credit side of his household accounts at the year's end.

But once let him commence the practice of running up bills—one at the tailor's, another at the dress-maker's and milliner's, another at the butcher's, another at the grocer's, and so on; and he never knows how he stands. He is deceived into debt; the road is made smooth and pleasant for him; things flow into the house for which he does not seem to pay. But they are all set down against him; and at the year's end, when the bills come in, he is ready to lift up his hands in dismay. Then he finds that the sweet of the honey will not repay for the smart of the sting.

It is the same as respects the poorer classes. Not many years since, Parliament passed a law facilitating the establishment of small-loan societies, for the purpose of helping small tradesmen and poor people generally to raise money on an emergency. The law was at once pounced upon by the numerous race of Graballs, as a means of putting money in their purse. They gave the working-classes facilities for running into debt, and for mortgaging their future industry. A few men, desirous of making money, would form themselves into a loan club, and offer sums of money ostensibly at five percent. interest, repayable in weekly installments. The laboring people eagerly availed themselves of the facility for getting in debt. One wanted money for "a spree," another wanted money for a suit of clothes, a third for an eight-day clock, and so on; and instead of saving the money beforehand, they preferred getting the money from the club, keeping themselves in difficulties and poverty until the debt was paid off. Such a practice is worse than living from hand to mouth: it is living upon one's own vitals.

It is easy to understand how the partners in the loan club made money. Suppose that they advanced ten pounds for three months at five per cent. It is repay-

able in weekly installments at ten shillings a week—the repayments commencing the very first week after the advance has been made. But though ten shillings are repaid weekly until the debt is wiped off, interest at five per cent. is charged upon the whole amount until the last installment is paid off. So that, though the nominal interest is five per cent., it goes on increasing until, during the last week, it reaches the enormous rate of one hundred per cent.! This is what is called “eating the calf in the cow’s belly.”

Men of genius are equally facile in running into debt. Genius has no necessary connection with prudence or self-restraint, nor does it exercise any influence over the common rules of arithmetic, which are rigid and inflexible. Men of genius are often superior to what Bacon calls “the wisdom of business.” Yet Bacon himself did not follow his own advice, but was ruined by his improvidence. He was in straits and difficulties when a youth, and in still greater straits and difficulties when a man. His life was splendid; but his excessive expenditure involved him in debts which created a perpetual craving for money. One day, in passing out to his antechambers, where his followers waited for his appearance, he said, “Be seated, my masters; your rise has been my fall.” To supply his wants, Bacon took bribes, and was thereupon beset by his enemies, convicted, degraded, and ruined.

Even men with a special genius for finance on a grand scale may completely break down in the management of their own private affairs. Pitt managed the national finances during a period of unexampled difficulty, yet was himself always plunged in debt. Lord Carrington, the ex-banker, once or twice, at Mr. Pitt’s request, examined his household accounts, and found the quantity of butcher’s meat charged in the

bills was one hundred-weight a week. The charge for servants’ wages, board wages, living, and household bills, exceeded two thousand three hundred pounds a year. At Pitt’s death, the nation voted forty thousand pounds to satisfy the demands of his creditors; yet his income had never been less than six thousand pounds a year; and at one time, with the wardenship of the Cinque Ports, it was nearly four thousand pounds a year more. Macaulay truly says that “the character of Pitt would have stood higher if, with the disinterestedness of Pericles and De Witt, he had united their dignified frugality.”

But Pitt by no means stood alone. Lord Melville was as unthrifty in the management of his own affairs as he was of the money of the public. Fox was an enormous ower, his financial maxim being that a man need never want money if he was willing to pay enough for it. Fox called the outer room at Almack’s, where he borrowed on occasions from Jew lenders at exorbitant premiums, his “Jerusalem Chamber.” Passion for play was his great vice, and at a very early age it involved him in debt to an enormous amount. It is stated by Gibbon that on one occasion Fox sat playing at hazard for twenty hours in succession, losing eleven thousand pounds. But deep play was the vice of high life in those days, and cheating was not unknown. Selwyn, alluding to Fox’s losses at play, called him Charles the Martyr.

Sheridan was the hero of debt. He lived on it. Though he received large sums of money in one way or another, no one knew what became of it, for he paid nobody. It seemed to melt away in his hands like snow in summer. He spent his first wife’s fortune of one thousand six hundred pounds in a six weeks’ jaunt at Bath. Necessity drove him to literature, and per-

haps to the stimulus of poverty we owe "The Rivals" and the dramas which succeeded it. With his second wife he obtained a fortune of five thousand pounds, and with fifteen thousand pounds, which he realized by the sale of Drury Lane shares, he bought an estate in Surrey, from which he was driven by debt and duns. The remainder of his life was a series of shifts, sometimes brilliant, but oftener degrading, to raise money and evade creditors. Taylor, of the Opera-house, used to say that if he took off his hat to Sheridan in the street, it would cost him fifty pounds; but if he stopped to speak to him, it would cost a hundred.

One of Sheridan's creditors came for his money on horseback. "That is a nice mare," said Sheridan. "Do you think so?" "Yes, indeed; how does she trot?" The creditor, flattered, told him he should see, and immediately put the mare at full trotting pace, on which Sheridan took the opportunity of trotting round the nearest corner. His duns would come in numbers each morning, to catch him before he went out. They were shown into the rooms on each side of the entrance hall. When Sheridan had breakfasted, he would come down, and ask, "Are those doors all shut, John?" and on being assured that they were, he marched out deliberately between them.

He was in debt all round—to his milkman, his grocer, his baker, and his butcher. Sometimes Mrs. Sheridan would be kept waiting for an hour or more while the servants were beating up the neighborhood for coffee, butter, eggs, and rolls. While Sheridan was pay-master of the navy, a butcher one day brought a leg of mutton to the kitchen. The cook took it and clapped it in the pot to boil, and went upstairs for the money; but not returning, the butcher coolly removed the pot-lid, took out the mutton, and walked away

with it in his tray. Yet, while living in these straits, Sheridan, when invited with his son into the country, usually went in two chaises and four—he in one, and his son Tom following in the other.

The end of all was very sad. For some weeks before his death he was nearly destitute of the means of subsistence. His noble and royal friends had entirely deserted him. Executions for debt were in his house, and he passed his last days in the custody of sheriffs' officers, who abstained from conveying him to prison merely because they were assured that to remove him would cause his immediate death.

The Cardinal de Retz sold off every thing to pay his debts but he did not recover his liberty. He described the perpetual anguish of the debtor. He even preferred confinement in the Castle of Vincennes to being exposed to the annoyances of his creditors. Mirabeau's life was one of perpetual debt; for he was a dreadful spendthrift. The only mode by which his father could keep him out of scrapes was by obtaining a *lettre de cachet*, and having him safely imprisoned. Though Mirabeau wielded the powers of the state, when he died he was so poor, or had been so extravagant, that he was still indebted to the tailor for his wedding-suit.

Lamartine ran through half a dozen fortunes, and at the end of his life was "sending round the hat." Lamartine boldly proclaimed that he hated arithmetic, "that negative of every noble thought." He was accordingly driven to very shabby shifts to live. The "Cours de Littérature" alone brought him in two hundred thousand francs a year, yet the money ran through his hands like quicksilver. His debts are said to have amounted to three millions of francs; yet his style of living remained unchanged. One of his enthusiastic admirers, having stinted himself in subscribing toward

the re-purchase of the Lamartine estates, went into a fish-monger's one day to purchase a piece of turbot. It was too dear for his means. A distinguished-looking personage entered, paused for a moment before the turbot, and, without questioning the price, ordered the fish to be sent to his house. It was M. de Lamartine.

Webster, the American statesman, was afflicted with impecuniosity, arising from his carelessness about money matters, as well as from his extravagance. If we are to believe Theodore Parker, Webster, like Bacon, took bribes: "He contracted debts and did not settle, borrowed and yielded not again. Private money sometimes clove to his hands. . . . A senator of the United States, he was pensioned by the manufacturers of Boston. His later speeches smell of bribes." Monroe and Jefferson were always in want of money, and often in debt; though they were both honest men.

The life which public men lead nowadays is often an incentive to excessive expenditure. They may be men of moderate means; they may even be poor; but not many of them, moving in general society, have the moral courage to *seem* to be so. To maintain their social position, they think it necessary to live as others do. They are thus drawn into the vortex of debt, and into all the troubles, annoyances, shabby shifts, and dishonesties which debt involves.

Men of science are for the most part exempt from the necessity of shining in society; and hence they furnish but a small number of instances of illustrious debtors. Many of them have been poor, but they have usually lived within their means. Kepler's life was indeed a struggle with poverty and debt; arising principally from the circumstance of his salary, as principal mathematician to the Emperor of Germany, having been always in arrear. This drove him to casting na-

tivities in order to earn a living. "I pass my time," he once wrote, "in begging at the doors of crown treasurers." At his death he left only twenty-two crowns, the dress he wore, two shirts, a few books, and many manuscripts. Leibnitz left behind him a large amount of debt; but this may have been caused by the fact that he was a politician as well as a philosopher, and had frequent occasion to visit foreign courts, and to mix on equal terms with the society of the great.

Spinoza was poor in means; yet inasmuch as what he earned by polishing glasses for the opticians was enough to supply his wants, he incurred no debts. He refused a professorship, and refused a pension, preferring to live and die independent. Dalton had a philosophical disregard for money. When his fellow-townsmen at Manchester once proposed to provide him with an independence, that he might devote the rest of his life to scientific investigation, he declined the offer, saying that "teaching was a kind of recreation to him, and that if richer he would probably not spend more time in his investigations than he was accustomed to do." Faraday's was another instance of moderate means and noble independence. Lagrange was accustomed to attribute his fame and happiness to the poverty of his father, the royal astronomer of Turin. "Had I been rich," he said, "probably I should not have become a mathematician."

The greatest debtor connected with science was John Hunter, who expended all his available means—and they were wholly earned by himself—in accumulating the splendid collection now known as the Hunterian Museum. All that he could collect in fees went to purchase new objects for preparation and dissection, or upon carpenters' and brick-layers' work for the erection of his gallery. Though his family were left in strait-

ened circumstances at his death, the sale of the collection to the nation for fifteen thousand pounds enabled all his debts to be paid, and at the same time left an enduring monument to his fame.

Great artists have nearly all struggled into celebrity through poverty, and some have never entirely emerged from it. This however, has been mainly because of their improvidence. Jan Steen was always in distress, arising principally from the habit he had acquired of drinking his own beer; for he was first a brewer and afterward a tavern-keeper. He drank and painted alternately, sometimes transferring the drinking scenes of which he had been a witness to the canvas, even while himself in a state of intoxication. He died in debt, after which his pictures rose in value, until now they are worth their weight in gold.

Notwithstanding the large income of Vandyck, his style of living was so splendid and costly as to involve him in heavy debt. To repair his fortunes, he studied alchemy for a time, in the hope of discovering the philosopher's stone. But toward the end of his life he was enabled to retrieve his position, and to leave a comfortable competency to his widow. Rembrandt, on the other hand, involved himself in debt through his love of art. He was an insatiable collector of drawings, armor, and articles of *virtu*, and thus became involved in such difficulties that he was declared a bankrupt. His property remained under legal control for thirteen years, until his death.

The great Italian artists were for the most part temperate and moderate men, and lived within their means. Haydon, in his "Autobiography," says, "Raffaello, Michael Angelo, Zeuxis, Apelles, Rubens, Reynolds, Titian, were rich and happy. Why? Because with their genius they combined practical prudence." Haydon him-

self was an instance of the contrary practice. His life was a prolonged struggle with difficulty and debt. He was no sooner free from one obligation than he was involved in another. His "Mock Election" was painted in the King's Bench prison, while he lay there for debt. There is a strange entry in his journal: "I borrowed ten pounds to-day of my butter-man, Webb, an old pupil of mine, recommended to me by Sir. George Beaumont twenty-four years ago, but who wisely, after drawing hands, set up a *butter-shop*, and was enabled to send his old master ten pounds in his necessity." Haydon's "Autobiography" is full of his contests with lawyers and sheriff's officers. Creditors dogged and dunned him at every step. "Lazarus's head," he writes, "was painted just after an arrest; Eucles was finished from a man in possession; the beautiful face in Xenophon in the afternoon, after a morning spent in begging mercy of lawyers; and Cassandra's head was finished in agony not to be described, and her hand completed after a broker's man inpossession, in an execution put in for taxes."

Cowper used to say that he never knew a poet who was not thriftless; and he included himself. Notwithstanding his quiet, retired life, he was constantly out-running the constable. "By the help of good management," he once wrote, "and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived in three months to spend the income of a twelvemonth." But though the number of thriftless poets may be great, it must not be forgotten that Shakspeare, who stands at the head of the list, was a prudent man. He economized his means, and left his family in comfort. His contemporaries were, however, for the most part indebted men. Ben Jonson was often embarrassed, and always poor, borrowing twenty shillings at a time from Henslowe; though