

## WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE

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THERE is no figure in the human scene which makes so unctuous an appeal to our relish of humanity as the landlady. When the landlady comes upon the stage at the theatre, we all awaken to an expectation of delight in the characteristic manifestations of her nature, and seldom are disappointed. The genius of the greatest of authors always unfolds with particular warmth in the presence of their landladies. A moment's reflection will recall a procession of immortal landladies. Whether it is that the colorful calling of landlady cultivates in one a peculiar richness of human nature, or whether landladies are born and not made—those with characters of especial tang and savor instinctively adopting this occupation,—I cannot say, but the fact is indisputable that landladies are not as other persons are. No one ever saw a humdrum landlady. A commonplace person as a landlady is unthinkable.

Now I think I may say that all my life, or nearly all, I have been an eager and earnest student of landladies. I am, indeed, much more familiar with the genus landlady than with courts and kings, or with eminent personages generally such as supply the material for most of those who write their recollections. Thus I am competent, I think, to speak on a subject curiously neglected by the memoirist.

One who makes a culture of landladies comes in time to have a flair for these racy beings, and is drawn by

a happy intuition to the habitats of those most resplendent in the qualities of their kind. Of course, one never can tell what life will bring forth, but it seems to me that my present landlady marks the top of my career as a connoisseur, an amateur, of landladies. She is strikingly reminiscent of an English landlady. And England, particularly London, is, as all the world knows, to the devotee of landladies what Africa is to the big game sportsman—his paradise. There the species comes to luxuriant flower, so that to possess with the mind one or two well-developed London landladies is never to be without food for entertainment. My present landlady, to return, is of course a widow. While it may be, for aught I know, that all widows are not landladies, with very few exceptions all landladies worthy of the name are widows. Those who are not widows outright are, as you might say, widows in a sense. That is, while their husbands may accurately be spoken of as living, and indeed are visible, they do not exist in the normal rôle of husband. The commercial impulses of the bona-fide husband have died in them, generally through their attachment to alcoholic liquor, and they become satellites, hewers of wood and drawers of water, to the genius awakened by circumstances in their wives.

I one time had a landlady of this origin in Norwalk, Connecticut. She was a woman of angular frame, with a face of flint, a tongue of vinegar, and a heart of gold. This, I have found in my travels, is the type of the

semiwidowed landlady. I had another such an identical one in Topeka, Kansas. The asperity, doubtless, is occasioned by biting disillusionment in the romance of long ago, but it is external; frost on the window; at the heart's core wells the sense of universe-embracing maternity which makes the character of the landlady by vocation sublime. All semiwidowed landladies have (it is their divine inspiration) large families of half-grown sons. My landlady of Norwalk grumbled continually; she could be heard out in the kitchen complaining in a shrill, querulous tone that, with things as high as they were, people would be crazy to expect meat twice a day. Yet she had at her board the meanest, most low-down, ornery, contemptible, despicable cuss in human form I ever knew, and the only fault I ever heard her find with him was that he didn't eat enough.

The erudite in landladies have, of course, cognizance of a class which are in no degree widows. Those of this department of the race, however, frequently are not landladies in fibre, but merely incidentally. They are young wives who for a transient period seek to help out in the domestic economy by taking a few lodgers who come with unexceptionable references. As wives doubtless they are meritorious; but no monument need be erected to them as landladies. Though I should like to see in the principal public square of every town and city a monument designed by an artist of ability placed to the enduring glory of the landladies of that place. For are not landladies ancient institutions fostering the public weal, and in their field not a whit less deserving of homage than governors and soldiers? I would say to a nation, show me your land-

ladies and I will tell you your destiny. I should be remiss, however, in my chronicle did I not note that among these partial and ephemeral landladies occasionally are to be found pronounced landlady potentialities. I recall a landlady I had on Montague Street, Brooklyn Heights, whose passion for cleaning amounted to a mania. This young person's housewifery frenzy always put me in mind of another soul who could not rest—Hokusai, who at about a hundred and four was spoken of as the old man mad about painting.

Hovering about, tortured by a desire to begin, when I left for my breakfast, she was still at it upon my return from my morning stroll, my door barricaded by articles of dismembered furniture; still at it when I came back a bit impatiently from a second walk; still at it while I read the paper in her dining-room. And so without surcease throughout the march of days and seasons. She unscrewed the knobs of the bed to polish the threads thereof; she removed penpoints from penholders and made them to shine like burnished gold. I had another landlady moved by the same springs of feeling, on Spruce Street, Philadelphia. Later, I heard, her husband died, and she espoused her latent career.

There is in the galaxy of landladies quite another type, an exotic plant in the wondrously competent sisterhood, specimens of which may be found blooming here and there like some rare orchid. I mean the fragile, lady landlady, the clinging vine bereft of the supporting husband oak. Such was Mrs. Knoll, of Central Avenue, Indianapolis, a little, plump, rounded body, exceedingly bright, pleasant, intelligent, amiable, and helpless; all of which qualities shone from her

very agreeable face and person. In her youth no doubt she was a type of beauty, and she remained very well preserved. "Life and vanity and disappointment had slipped away" from Dr. Knoll some years before; and his widow and only child, Miss Knoll, were left in possession of the old family home, and nothing more. They could not bear to leave it, that would "break their hearts", said good, ineffectual Mrs. Knoll; so it was viewed by them, unfortunately somewhat fallaciously, in the light of a possible support. The Doctor evidently was a man of books, and his widow had sought, more and more, companionship in reading. Life—the actual world about her, that is—, and vanity, but not disappointment, had, in a manner of speaking, slipped from her, too. And she had turned to that great world of shadows. "In books", she said, "I can choose my own company." She had plighted her troth in youth to Dickens and to Thackeray, and to these she had remained ever faithful. In a world of false books and unsafe friends she knew that she had by the hand two true spirits. Jane Austen she loaned me with tremulous pleasure. And she was very fond of Mr. Howells, with whom, she said, she lived a great deal; and the Kentons, the Laphams, and the Marches, were characters better known to her "than her next door neighbors". But it must be confessed that the tender perfume of Mrs. Knoll was not altogether an equivalent in the sphere of her passive efforts to the homely vegetable odor of the authentic landlady.

In great cities, amid the sheen of civilization, is to be found just adjacent to smart quarters of the town the tulip in the variegated garden of landladies—the finished, polished

stone gathered from the mine, the bird of plumage of the species; I mean, of course, the landlady *du beau monde*, the modish landlady, or perhaps I should say, the professional hostess, as it were. For it seems rather vulgar, a thing repellent to the finer sensibilities, to touch this distinguished figure of immaculate artificiality with the plebeian term of "landlady". The personages of this type are, so to say, of the peerage of their order. Such a Lady Drew it was whose guest I became for a time on Madison Avenue, New York. With silvered hair like a powdered coiffure; softly tinted with the delicate enamel of cosmetic; rich and stately of corsage—this expensive and highly sophisticated presence presided, in the subdued tone of the best society, over the nicely adjusted machinery of her smart establishment by the authority of a consciousness of highly cultivated efficiency and an aroma of unexceptionable standards. This consummate hostess type of landlady is, of course, one which the passionate collector will preserve in the cabinet of his mind with tremulous happiness in the sheer preciousness of it. I cannot but feel, however, myself that this type fails of complete perfection as a work of art in this: that in every work of the first genius, it cannot be denied, there is always a strain of coarseness. And perhaps I should confess that my own taste in landladies, though I hope it is not indiscriminating, leans a bit toward the popular taste, the relish of the Rabelaisian.

Stevenson has observed that most men of high destinies have even high-sounding names. And anyone who has reflected at all upon the phenomenon of landladies must have been struck by the singularly idiosyn-

cratic character of their names. Indeed, an infallible way to pick out a competent landlady from an advertisement is by her name. Is it a happy name for a landlady? Go there! As her name is, so is her nature. I one time had a landlady on Broome Street, New York, whom the gods named Mrs. Brew. I one time had a landlady (in Milligan Place, Manhattan) of the name of Mrs. Boggs. One time I had a landlady just off the East India Dock Road, London, whose name was Wigger. I shall always cherish the memory of the landlady I had down in Surrey, Mrs. Cheeseman. One and all, these ladies, as landladies, were without strain.

Regarded as a bibelot, Mrs. Wigger was, I think, of the first perfection. In her own genre, so to say, she was as finished, as impossible of improvement, as an Elgin marble, a Grecian urn, a bit of Chinese blue and white, a fan of old Japan, a Vermeer, a Whistler symphony, a caricature by Max Beerbohm. She was of massive mould and very individually shapen. Her face was very large and very red and heavily pock-marked. In her bizarre garments, in some indefinable way she imparted to the character of the born slattern something of the Grand Style. Her utterance was quavered in a weird, cracked voice, which had somewhat an effect as of the wind crying high aloft in a ship's rigging. She slipped about, always a bit unsteadily. Her movements and her manner generally, I felt, made it not unreasonable to suppose that she had in secret certain habits no longer widely approved by society. The apple of her eye was an unkempt parrot which spent its days in vainly attempting to ascend the embracing sides of a tin bathtub.

Landladies, beyond all other persons, have the esoteric power of becoming for one the geniuses of places. It would, for instance, be quite impossible for anyone to visualize my Mrs. Cheeseman torn from, as you might say, her context. If you were asked to describe Mrs. Cheeseman you would naturally do it in this way: you would say, "Well, I wonder what has become of the sweetest, quaintest, fairest old inn in all England!" And into your mind would come a rapid cinematograph picture:

A highway winding out of Dorking, stretching its way between hills to the sea. You round a turn and see before you long, low, glistening white stables—the stables, evidently, of a coaching inn. And presently you come into view of an ancient, white, stone building with a "Sussex roof". From a tall post before the door swings the board of the "King's Head". White ducks ride in a pond at the roadside there. Round this inn which you are approaching is the greenest, handsomest hedge ever seen. And along the road beyond you perceive the cottages of a wee village.

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." The romance of destiny which in its inscrutable way has been leading you all your long life long to the bosom, if I may so put it, of Mrs. Cheeseman, reveals its beneficence now by carefully graduated steps. At the other side of the main bulk of the "King's Head", which it was given you first to see, you come upon a delicious little flagged yard leading to another arm of the house, older still, very venerable, with a high roof low descending, a roof which tucks under its projecting wing many oddly placed little latticed windows gayly sporting

innumerable tiny panes. Like a miniature cathedral spire, a tall, quaint chimney stands sentinel at one corner, and several chimney-pots peep over the roof's dark crown. Up this little yard, bounded on one side by a multicolored flower garden whose fragrance bathes you in a softening vapor of perfume, you enter, by a door which requires you to stoop, the wee taproom. Here: a cavernous fireplace, settles are within against its sides, a gigantic blackened crane swung across its middle, and a cubby-hole of a window at its back. Above it is swung an ancient fowling-piece. The stone floor of the room, like the ancient flags without, is worn into dips and hollows. Along the window-sill of an oblong window measuring one wall is a bright parade of potted plants.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there is something psychic about landladies. As you look about you at the environment in which you find yourself, you experience a premonition that you are nearing an affinity in the landlady world. It is strange, too, that there are places where you have never been before (in the life which you consciously remember) that give you at once completely the feeling of your having arrived at the home familiar to your spirit. And there presently transpires here an event in your career predetermined (I doubt not) æons and æons ago. A buxom body with the most glorious complexion (you ween) in all England—which is to say in the world—enters the ancient room: a lass whose rosy, honest,

pedestrian face and bursting figure are to become forever more for you the connotation of the name "Maggie". The daughter, this, (you later learn) of your Mrs. Cheeseman.

Soon it is all arranged, and you are having your tea—a "meat tea"—in the sitting-room of the "King's Head", your sitting-room now. A bucolic slavey—a person whose cheerful simpleness is like to that of the little creatures of the field—attends you. In this commodious apartment of yours is a great scintillation of chintz; flowers, in pots and vases, everywhere caress the eye; and the fancy is kindled by the spectacle of many stuffed birds in glass cases. On the heavily flowered wall hangs a handsome specimen of the "glass" (invariably found in England) for forecasting the weather; a "piano-forte", as piquantly old-fashioned as a cocked hat, crosses one end wall; and venerable paintings (which time has mellowed to the richness and the general color effect of an old plug of tobacco), bright sporting prints, and antique oddities of furniture to an extent that it would require a catalogue to name, all combine to give an air of true sitting-room opulence to the chamber.

But of landladies, and the connotations of landladies, one could write a book of several volumes; and it being a very fair day, and a Sunday, and the first cool breath after a very hot summer, I do not think I shall write those volumes this afternoon; I shall go out for a bit of air and a look at the world.

MURRAY HILL



## SOME RECENT BOOKS OF VERSE

BY MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

## I

THE best part of this volume of translations of "Les Fleurs du Mal" by Baudelaire is the preface, which is as fine a masterpiece in the art of interpretation—notwithstanding some repetitions—as the "Notice" by Théophile Gautier of the edition of 1868. The translator has succeeded better with the "Petits Poèmes en Prose" than with the poems proper. Gautier compares "Petits Poèmes en Prose" to the music of Weber; he hears the horn of Oberon and sees Titania:

Quand on écoute la musique de Weber, on éprouve d'abord une sensation de sommeil magnétique, une sorte d'apaisement qui vous sépare sans secousse de la vie réelle, puis dans le lointain résonne une note étrange qui vous fait dresser l'oreille avec inquiétude. \* \* \* Cette note est comme un soupir du monde surnaturel, comme la voix des esprits invisibles qui s'appellent. Obéron vient d'emboucher son cor et la forêt magique s'ouvre, allongeant à l'infini des allées bleuâtres, se peuplant de tous les êtres fantastiques décrits par Shakespeare dans "le songe d'une nuit d'été" et Titania elle-même apparaît dans sa transparente robe de gaze d'argent.

All students of French literature know of the psychological relations between Poe and Baudelaire; if one could judge only by these translations, Poe as a poet has undoubtedly the greater talent. Read "To Helen" after having tried to read aloud this translator's rendering of "Le Balcon".

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,  
O toi, tous mes plaisirs! o toi, tous mes devoirs!  
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,  
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,  
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!

Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,  
O thou, my pleasure, thou, all my desire,  
Thou shalt recall the beauty of caresses,  
The charm of evenings by the gentle fire,  
Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses!

As another example, take the "Madrigal Triste", which the translator calls the "Madrigal of Sorrow",—

Que n'importe que tu sois sage?  
Sois belle! et sois triste! Les pleurs  
Ajoutent un charme au visage,  
Comme le fleuve au paysage;  
L'orage rajeunit les fleurs.

Je t'aime surtout quand la joie  
S'enfuit de ton front terrassé;  
Quand ton cœur dans l'horreur se noie;  
Quand sur ton présent se déploie  
Le nuage affreux du passé.

The translator, it must be admitted, is faithful unto death when he writes:

What do I care though you be wise?  
Be sad, be beautiful; your tears  
But add one more charm to your eyes,  
As streams to valleys where they rise;  
And fairer every flower appears.

After the storm, I love you most  
When joy has fled your brow downcast;  
When your heart is in horror lost,  
And o'er your present like a ghost  
Floats the dark shadow of the past.

And later, "Hotter than blood from your large eye . . ." is correct, of course, but regrettable. The first stanza of "Bénédiction" is hardly so correct,—which leads us to ask the question, Are Baudelaire's poems translatable at all?

The prose poems, however, could not be better done, except by Huneker himself, who goes somewhat too far, however, when he says that Baudelaire's motto might have been,—

The devil is in heaven,  
All's wrong with the world.

Without God, in whom Baudelaire believed, in his heaven, he would have