

SLANDER.

BY LADY COOK, DEE TENNESSEE CLAFLIN

There is some doubt about the historical origin of the word "slander," but none as to its meaning.

Ihre, in his glossary of the Swedo-Gothic, makes the French *esclandre* equivalent to the Swedish *Klander*, an ill report, an obloquy, or infamy. And our English word is derived from the French *esclandre*. Chaucer Anglicized it and wrote it *scandre*. Philologists derive the French word from the low Latin *scandalum*, but the Anglo-Saxon *slcan*, to beat or wound—in this case by evil report—has been suggested as the derivation of slander. The two-fold meaning of *esclandre* gives a faint countenance to this notion, for it also denoted slaughter as well as misfortune or disaster.

To slander is "to censure falsely, to defame, to calumniate," and slander itself is, therefore, a calumny, a false and malicious detraction or defamation of the character or conduct of another, and is punishable by the law, which distinguishes between spoken and written defamation. The first is slander; the second, libel. To speak or write against the great was once an enormous crime known as *scandalum magnatum*.

How few have escaped slander of some sort! How many are there who have not only been wounded by it, but have been downright slain, driven from society with damaged fortunes and broken hearts. If we rise above the crowd, detraction dogs us like our shadows. Calumny stalks behind with baleful eye watching every word and movement for evil misrepresentation, and by a hateful alchemy, converts our gold to lead, but never the lead to gold. Our friends too often misinterpret our feelings and views, and our enemies persistently endeavour to disparage or pervert them. Even those who live under our roofs and eat from our tables are frequently domestic spies, ready like the ungrateful hound, to bite the hand that feeds them. For slander is the natural weapon of the faithless, the ignorant, the envious, the malicious, the cowardly, and the unjust. Weak and ignoble dispositions wield it against all that is wiser, stronger, or better than themselves. Those who do not see with their eyes, and judge with their perceptions—however blind or feeble these may be—are not merely suspected of evil, but are at once boldly charged with all that make for infamy.

If we turn to the pages of history, what miserable pictures do they present us of the follies and wickednesses of mankind. The greatness that has been achieved during the past has been the work of the few, who, in spite of sneers and scoffs and general detraction, persevered in the good work that lay before them. Ahead of their times, these pioneers of progress, gifted with enlightened views and a high sense of duty, marched straight on to their goal whether it gave them a crown or a crucifix. They were the world's true great ones, who by sheer force of their moral and intellectual powers lifted the multitudes to higher planes whether they would or not. The people may have ridiculed their teachers, stoned their poets, stoned the prophets, and banished or burnt the expounders of science; nevertheless, the seeds of truth

**Boils**

It is often difficult to convince people their blood is impure, until dreadful carbuncles, abscesses, boils, scrofula or salt rheum, are painful proof of the fact. It is wisdom now, or whenever there is any indication of

**Impure**

blood, to take Hood's Sarsaparilla, and prevent such eruptions and suffering. "I had a dreadful carbuncle abscess, red, fiery, fierce and sore. The doctor attended me over seven weeks. When the abscess broke, the pains were terrible, and I thought I should not live through it. I heard and read so much about Hood's Sarsaparilla, that I decided to take it, and my husband, who was suffering with boils, took it also. It soon purified our

**Blood**

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which were sown in tears and watered with their blood, have become mighty trees of knowledge of good and evil, and must eventually overspread the whole earth.

We have no need to look for examples in other countries, for the records of England are filled with instances of men and women, virtuous in themselves and beneficent to others, who have been destroyed by slander. The higher we go the stronger is the evidence. Loyalty and integrity have not been proof against it. "Serve a great man," says a Spanish proverb, "and you will know what sorrow is."

The ingratitude of the rich and the noble, and the ready ear they give to slander against those who serve them well and faithfully, are notorious. "Put not your trust in princes," was the soul-felt quotation of the fallen Strafford when he heard that Charles had signed his death-warrant. A King's oath was as a feather when weighed against expediency. Edward Spenser, who died broken-hearted at Westminster in 1599, wise poet though he was, had leant on royalty and found it an unstable reed. Who could sing better than he the folly of dependence on the great? We still feel the pathos of his lines coming straight from a lofty and disappointed mind wrecked by slander:—

"Full little knowest thou that hast not tried,  
What hell it is in suing long to bide;  
To lose good days that might be better spent;  
To waste long nights in pensive discontent;  
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow;  
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow;  
To have thy prince's grace, yet want his peers;  
To have thy asking, yet wait many years;  
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares;  
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs;  
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,  
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone."

But if the tender mercies of the great have been cruel, those of the populace have been found equally bitter, and with less reason. One of our proverbs says, "Slander leaves a score behind it." Rumour spreads and multiplies it and gives it various aspects. It resembles a snow-ball that gathers as it rolls. And this pestilent and cruel power is exercised by the most worthless of mankind. How many gallant gentlemen went to the block for the forgeries and perjuries of Titus Oates. We have still, perhaps, many Oates, Bedloes, and Dangerfields among us were the opportunity given them to be enriched by calumniating others. But slanderers cannot aim so high as in former times, and so the vilest of them are reduced to black-mailing. These, however, are the experts in this vice. By easy gradations we descend from the turpitude of black-mailing to ordinary slander and back-biting, and from these to mischievous tittle-tattle. The expressive wink, the sly innuendo, the shrug which says nothing but means so much, and even silence when the truth should be told, are all in a small way pressed into the service.

For there are some who slander for pleasure, as others for profit, and who resemble the libeller described by the author of *Hudibras*. He "endeavours with his own evil words to corrupt another Man's good Manners. All his Works are but of two Things, his own Malice and another Man's Faults. . . . He is not much concerned whether what he writes be true or false, that's nothing to his purpose, which aims only at filthy and bitter, and (therefore his Language is like Pictures of the Devil, the fouler the better—He robs a man of his good Name, not for any good it will do him (for he dares not own it) but merely, as a Jackdaw steals Money, for his Pleasure."

Yet all feel it to be as true as when Shakespeare wrote it, that it is far worse to rob one of reputation than of hard cash:—

Good name, in man or woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;  
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;  
But he that filches from me my good name,  
Robs me of that which nothing enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed.

If this be so, then the assassin of a good and deserved reputation merits a heavier punishment than the thief or burglar.

How then can we arm ourselves against the malice of envy or the falsehoods of slander? By treating them with contemptuous silence and living down their assaults; by rendering good for evil and kindness for railing; by acting up to our consciences in right and duty regardless of what may be said; and by opposing to venomous obliquy the sweetness of a blameless life. It is not the weapon or word of Justice that can blunt those of 'Slander; whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue outvenoms all the worms of Nile," but the example set by virtue. "You should live virtuously for many reasons," said the caustic Juvenal about eighteen hundred years ago "but particularly on this account, that you may be able to despise the tongues of your domestics. The

tongue is the worst part of a bad servant."

From this we gather that the very slaves indulged freely in slandering their owners, so prone is human nature to detraction. Perhaps Juvenal also found, as many do still, that there were fellow citizens base enough to interview the servants for domestic treason in order to traduce the family. Such vermin occasionally infest English homes as well as the Roman. But all who value the purity and comfort of society, and who believe in the inestimable worth of a good name, will unite in putting down such pests, with all other meddlers and busy-bodies and private detectives in the cause of defamation.

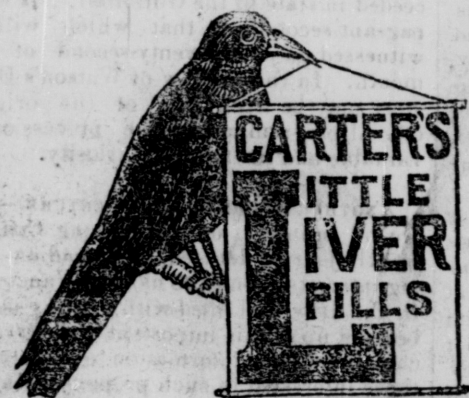
As Cicero said, "It is as hard for the good to suspect evil, as it is for the bad to suspect good." But when the evil is forced upon our notice, patent and notorious, it would be affectation to shut our eyes to it. Slander is an enormous and acknowledged evil. There are thousands who live by it, to the suffering of others. It is to some extent publicly encouraged, and tends to increase. The welfare of society and the peace of families demand, therefore, that it should be met with every kind of repression, and no good citizen will refuse to assist in so manly and wholesome a work.

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