

THE SCIENCE OF KISSING!!

THE AFTER-DINNER TALK OF JEREMY SHORT, ESQ.

WHAT glorious times, Oliver, the old Turks must have, sitting, on a sultry day like this, listening to the cool plashing of their fountains, and smoking their chibouques—egad!—until they fall asleep, and dream of dark-eyed Houris smiling on them, amid the fragrant groves and by the cool rivers of a Musselman Paradise. What a pity we were not born in Turkey, you a Bashaw of three tails, and I the Sultaun of Stamboul! How we would have stroked our beards—and smoked our pipes—and given praise to the prophet as we drank our sherbert, spiced, you know, with a *very* little of the *aqua vitæ*, that comfort of comforts to the inner man! We could then have dressed like gentlemen, and not gone about, as we do now, breeched, coated, and swaddled in broadcloth, like a couple of Egyptian mummies. Just imagine yourself in a dashing Turkish dress, with a turban on your head, and a scimitar all studded with diamonds at your side, with which—the scimitar I mean—you are wont to slice off the heads of infidels as I slice off the top of this pyramid of ice-cream—help yourself, for it's delicious! I think I see us now, charging at the head of our spahis against the rascally Russians, driving their half starved soldier slaves like chaff before a whirlwind, and carrying our horse-tails and shouting "Il Allah!" into the very tents of their chieftains. What magnificent fellows we would have made! Ah!—my dear boy—you and I are out of our element. Take my word for it, a Turk is your finest gentleman, your true philosopher, the only man that understands how to live. He keeps better horses, wears richer clothes, walks with a nobler mien, smokes more luxuriously, drinks more seductive coffee, and kisses his wife or ladye-love with better grace, than any man or set of men, except you and I, "under the broad canopy of heaven" as the town-meeting orators have it. And let me tell you this last accomplishment—this kissing gracefully, "*secundum artem*"—is a point of education most impiously neglected amongst us. KISSING is a science by itself. Let us draw up to the window where we can drink in the perfume of the garden, and while you whiff away at your meerschaum, I will prove the truth of my assertion. One has a knack for talking after dinner—I suppose it is because good steaks and madeira lubricate the tongue.

We are born to kiss and be kissed. It comes natural to us, as marriage does to a woman. Why, sir, I can remember kissing the female babies when I was yet in my cradle, and my friend Sir Thomas

Lawrence did himself the honor to paint me at my favorite pursuit, as you know by that exquisite picture in my library. The very first day I went to school I kissed all the sweet little angels there. I wasn't fairly out of my alphabet, when I used to wait behind a pump, for my sweetheart to come out of school, and as soon as I saw her I made a point of kissing her just to see how prettily she blushed. As I grew older I loved to steal in, some summer evening, on her, and kiss her asleep on the sofa—or, if she was awake, and the old folks were by, I'd wait till they both got nodding, and then kiss her all the sweeter for the slyness of the thing. Ah! such stolen draughts are delicious. I would n't give a sous to kiss a girl in company, and I always hated Copenhagen, Pawns, and your other kissing plays, as I hope I hate the devil. They had a shocking custom when I was young, that everybody at a wedding should kiss the bride, just as they all drank, in the same free and easy way, out of the one big china punch-bowl; but the practice always hurt my sensibilities, and I avoided weddings as I would avoid a ghost, a bailiff, or any other fright. No—no—get your little charmer up into a corner by yourselves—watch when everybody's back is turned—then slip your arm around her waist, and kiss her with a long sweet kiss, as if you were a bee sucking honey from a flower. Nor can one kiss every girl. I'd as lief take ipecacuanha as kiss some of your sharp-chinned, icicle-mouthed, lignum-vitæ-faced spinsters—why one couldn't get the taste of the bitters out of his mouth for a week! I go in for your rosy, pouting lips, that seem to challenge everybody so saucily—egad! when we kiss such at our leisure, we think we're in a seventh heaven. I once lived on such a kiss for forty-eight hours, for it took the taste for commoner food out of my mouth "intirely," as poor Power used to say. Oh! how I loved the wide, dark entries one finds in old mansions, where one could catch these saucy little fairies, and, before they were well aware of your presence, kiss them so deliciously. There's kissing for you! Or, to go upon a sleigh ride, and when all, save you and your partner, are busy chatting—while the merry ringing of the bells and the whizzing motion of the vehicle cause your spirits to dance for very joy—to make believe that you wish to arrange the buffalo, or pull her shawl up closer around her, and then slyly stealing your face into her bonnet to kiss her for an instant of ecstasy, while she blushes to the very temples, lest others may catch you at your

sport. And then, on a summer eve, to row out upon the bosom of a moonlit lake, and while one of the ladies sings and all the rest listen, to snatch a chance and laughingly kiss the pretty girl at your side, all unnoticed except by her. Or to sit beside a charmer on a sofa, before a cozy fire on a bitter winter night, and fill up the pauses of the conversation, you know, by drawing her to you and kissing her. But more than all,—when you have won a blushing confession of love from her you have long and tremblingly worshipped with all a boy's devotion,—is the rapture of the kiss which you press holly to her brow, while her warm heart flutters against your side, and every pulse in your body thrills with an ecstasy that has no rival in after life. Ah! sir, that kiss is THE KISS. It is worth all the rest.

Next to being born a Turk I should choose to have been born an Englishman in the days of Harry the Eighth. Do you remember how Erasmus tells us, in one of his letters, that all the pretty women in London ran up to him and kissed him whenever they met? That's what I call being in clover. I don't wonder people long for the good old times, for, if all their fashions were like this, commend me to the days of the bluff monarch, when

“thus passed on the time,
With jolly ways in those brave old days,
When the world was in its prime.”

Did you ever attend a children's party, and see the little dears play Copenhagen? The boys seem to have an instinctive knack at kissing their partners, who always show the same modest repugnance—for modesty is inborn in every woman—aye! and flings a glory about her like the halo around a Madonna's head. The very instant one of the young scapegraces gets into the ring, he looks slyly all around it, and there be sure is one little face that blushes scarlet, and one little heart that beats faster, for well the owner knows that she is in peril. How fast her hands slide to and fro along the rope, and directly the imprisoned youngster makes a dash at her hand, and, missing it, turns away amid the uproarious laughter and clapping of hands of the rest, and essays perchance a feint to tap some other little hand, all the while, however, keeping one corner of his eye fixed on the blushing damsel who has foiled him. And lo! all at once—like an eagle shooting from the skies—he darts upon it. And now begins the struggle. What a shouting—and merry laughing—what cries of encouragement from the lookers on—what a diving under the rope, and over the rope, and among the chairs, mingled with whoopings from the boys, ensues, until the victim has escaped, or else been caught by her pursuer. Sometimes she submits quietly to the forfeit, but at other times she will fight like a young tiger. Then, indeed, comes “the tug of war.” If she covers her face in her hands, and is a sturdy little piece beside, young Master Harry will have to give up the game, and be the laughing stock of the boys, or else set all chivalry at defiance and tear away those pretty hands by force. Many a time, you old curmudgeon, have I laughed

until the tears ran out of my eyes to see a young scoundrel, scarcely breeched, kissing an unwilling favorite. How sturdily he sticks up to her, one hand around her neck, and the other, perhaps, fast hold of her chin; while she, with face averted, and a frown upon her tiny brow, is all the while pushing him desperately away. But the young rascal knows that he is the strongest, and with him might makes right. With eagerness in every line of his face, he slips his arm around her waist, and, after sundry repulses, wins the kiss at last. And then what a mighty gentleman he thinks he is! In just such a scene has my old friend Lawrence taken me off, in that picture, of THE PROFFERED KISS, in my library, egad!

It is a great grief to me that so few understand how to kiss gracefully. Kissing is an accomplishment, I may be allowed to remark, that should form a part of every gentleman's education. A man that is too bashful to kiss a lady when all is agreeable, as Mrs. Malaprop would say, is a poor good-for-nothing, a lust sinner, without hope of mercy! He will never have the courage to pop the question—mark my words—and will remain a bachelor to his dying day, unless some lady kindly takes him in hand and asks him to have her, as my friend Mrs. Desperate did. The women have a sly way of doing these things, even if, like a spinster I once knew, they have to ask a man flatly whether his intentions are serious or not; and they are very apt to do this as soon as the kissing becomes a business on your part. But to return to the *modus operandi* of a kiss. Delicacy in this intellectual amusement is the chief thing. Do n't—by the bones of Johannes Secundus!—do n't bungle the matter by a five minutes torture, like a cat playing with a mouse. Kiss a girl deliberately, sir—sensible all the time of the great duty you are performing—but remember also that a kiss, to be enjoyed in its full flavor, should be taken fresh, like champagne just from the flask. Ah! then you get it in all its airy and *spirituelle* raciness. If you wish a sentimental kiss—and after all they are perhaps the spicier—steal your arm around her waist, take her hand softly in your own, and then, tenderly drawing her towards you, kiss her as you might imagine a zephyr to do it! I never exactly timed the manœuvre with a stop-watch, but I've no doubt the affair might be managed very handsomely in ten seconds. The exact point where a lady should be kissed may be determined by the intersection of two imaginary lines, one drawn perpendicularly down the centre of the face, and the other passing at right angles through the line of the mouth. Two such old codgers as you and I may talk of these things without indiscretion; and, it is but doing our duty by the world, to give others the benefits of our experience. Some of these days, when I get leisure, shall write a book called “KISSING MADE EASY.” The title—do n't you think?—will make it sell.

Kissing, however, has its evils, for the world, you know, is made up of sweet and sour. One often gets into a way of kissing a pretty girl by way of a flirtation, and ends by tumbling head over ears into love with her. This is taking the disease in its most

virulent form; but—thank the stars!—it is most apt to attend on cases where the gentleman has not been used to kissing. I would recommend, as a general rule, that every one should be inoculated to the matter, for, depend upon it, this is the only way to save them from a desperate and perhaps fatal attack. I once knew a fine fellow—talented, rich, in a profession—whose only fault, indeed, was that he had never kissed anybody but his sister. He had the most holy horror of a man who could so insult the dignity of the sex as to kiss a lady—and, I verily believe, the sight of such a thing, in his younger days, would have thrown him into a fit. At length he fell in love; and as sweet a creature was Blanche Merrión as ever trod greensward, or sang from very gaiety of heart on the morning air. Day after day her lover watched her from afar, as a worshipper would watch the countenance of a saint; but months passed by and still he dared not lift his eyes to her face, when her own were shining on him from their calm, holy depths. Other suitors appeared, and if Blanche had fancied them, she would have been lost forever to Howard, through his own timidity; but happily none of them touched her heart, and she went on her way “in maiden meditation fancy free.” Often, in her own gay style of raillery, would she torment poor Howard about his bashfulness; and during these moments, I verily believe, he would gladly have exchanged his situation for that of any heretic that ever roasted in an inquisitorial fire. A twelvemonth passed by, and yet Howard could not muster courage to express his devotion, and if, perchance, his eyes sometimes revealed his tale, the confession faded from them as soon as the liquid ones of Blanche were turned upon him. If ever one suffered, he suffered from his love. He worshipped his divinity in awe-struck humility, scarcely deeming she would deign to see his adoration. He might have said with Helena,

“thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
But knows of him no more.”

At length a friend of Howard asked him to wait on him as a groomsman, and who should be his partner but Blanche! Now, of all places for kissing, commend me to a wedding. The groom kisses the bride—and the groomsman kiss the bridesmaids—and each one of the company kisses his partner, or if any one is destitute of the article he makes a dumb show of kissing somebody behind the door. But the groomsman have the cream of the business, for it's one of the perquisites of their office that they should kiss their partners, as a sort of recompense for shawling them, and chaperoning them, and paying them those thousand little attentions which are so exquisite to a lady, and which a gentleman can only pay, especially if the lady is grateful, at some peril to his peace of mind. Ah! sir, a bride-maid is a bachelor's worst foe—one plays with edge tools when he waits at a wedding—and though you may dance with an angel or flirt with a Hourí, I'd

never—heaven bless you—recommend you to wait on a girl unless you were ready to marry. Seeing other folks married is infectious, and, before you know it, you'll find yourself engaged. It was a lucky chance for Howard when he was asked to wait on Blanche, for I would stake my life that nothing else could have cured him of his bashfulness. Nor even then would he have succeeded but for an accident. One lovely afternoon—it was a country wedding—he happened to pass by a little sort of summer-house in a secluded spot in the grounds attached to the mansion, and who should he see within but Blanche, asleep on a garden sofa. I wish I could paint her to you as she then appeared. One arm was thrown negligently back over her head, while the other fell towards the floor, holding the book she had been reading. Her long, soft eye-lashes were drooped on her cheek. Her golden curls fell, like a shower of sunbeams scattered through the forest leaves on a secluded stream, around her brow and down her neck; and one fair tress, stealing across her face and nestling in her bosom, waved in her breath, and rose and fell with the gentle heaving of that spotless bust. A slight color was on her cheek, and her lips were parted in a smile the smallest space imaginable, disclosing the pure teeth beneath, seeming like a line of pearl set betwixt rubies, or a speck of snow within a budding rose. Howard would have retreated, but he could not, and so he stood gazing on her entranced, until, forgetting everything in that sight, he stole towards her, and falling on his knees, hung a moment enraptured over her. As he thus knelt, his eyes glanced an instant on the book. It was the poems of Campbell, and open at a passage which he had the evening before commended. Blanche had pencilled one verse which he had declared especially beautiful. His heart leapt into his mouth. His eyes stole again to that lovely countenance, and instinctively he bent down and pressed his lips softly to those of Blanche. Slight, however, as was the kiss, it broke her slumber, and she started up; but when her eyes met those of Howard the crimson blood rushed over her face, and brow, and down even to her bosom, while the lover stood, even more abashed, rooted to the spot. Poor fellow! he would have given the world if he could have recalled that moment's indiscretion. He stammered out something for an apology, he knew not what, yet without daring to lift his eyes to her face. She made no reply. A minute of silence passed. Could he have offended past forgiveness? He was desperate with agony and terror at the thought—and, in that very desperation, resolved to face the worst, and looked up. The bosom of Blanche heaved violently, her eyes were downcast, her cheek was changing from pale to red and from red to pale. All her usual gaiety had disappeared, and she stood embarrassed and confused, yet without any marks of displeasure, such as the lover had looked for, on her countenance. A sudden light flashed on him, a sudden boldness took possession of him. He lifted the hand of Blanche—that tiny hand which now trembled in his grasp—and said,

“Blanche! dear Blanche! if you forgive me, be still more merciful, and give me a right to offend thus again. I love you, oh! how deeply and fervently!—I have loved you with an untiring devotion for years. Will you, dearest, be mine?” and in a torrent of burning eloquence—for the long pent-up emotions of years had now found vent—he poured forth the whole history of his love, its doubts and fears, its sensitiveness, its adoration, its final hope. And did Blanche turn away? No—you needn’t smile so meaningly, you old villain—she sank sobbing on her lover’s shoulder, who, when at length she was soothed, was as good as his word, and sinned by a second kiss. It turned out that Blanche had loved him all along, and it was only his bashfulness that had blinded him, else by a thousand little tokens he might have seen what, in other ways, it would have

been unmaidenly for her to reveal. Now, sir, months of mutual sorrow might have been saved to both Blanche and her lover, if he had only possessed a little more assurance—he would have possessed that assurance if he had been less finical—if he had been less finical he would not have been shocked at kissing a pretty girl. Isn’t that demonstrated like a problem in the sixth book?

I might multiply instances, egad, for fifty years of experience *will* store one’s memory with facts, and by the aid of them I could reel off arguments for this accomplishment faster than a rocket whizzes into the sky. *Kissing*, sir—but there goes the supper bell, and I see your meerschaum’s out. We will rejoin the ladies, and after taking our Mocha, set the young folks to dancing, while you and I accompany them on the shovel and tongs!—Ta-ra-la-ra!