

own nice garden, the apple-cream placed in the big glass dish, and the pudding tied ready for the pot. I was watching our good housewife as she went back and forth in her spotless kitchen, when suddenly I heard the light flying steps of children, and two young creatures, a boy of about five years of age and a little girl of seven, came in so covered with snow that but for their rosy cheeks and chattering tongues I should have taken them for two snow images. They had been out with their sled, as they called it; and had tumbled from it so often in their sliding down hill that all their garments had a firm coating of the glistening snow. As each laid aside comforter, cap, and hood, I saw that the boy had curly brown hair, but the girl's wavy locks were as fair as her face almost, and you could see that she had a sensitive, clinging nature, and I could not help wondering what her future might be. Well, they sat themselves down by the great kitchen fire, where a pot hung on a long crook, or crane, full of boiling lard, waiting for the few remaining crullers to be dropped in it. A great platter of the crisp brown doughnuts was already on the table, which the children eyed so lovingly that their mother gave them each one, and, telling them to go to bed, said—

"For you know, dears, that Christkindchen never comes to fill the stockings of the good little children till they are all asleep."

Then you should have seen the awe that stole into the little girl's face as she turned her fluffy head, and looking up into the broad chimney, said—

"Christkindchen! Christkindchen! we have been good; please put something nice into our stockings, but be very careful of the fire when you come down, or it will burn you."

And Christkindchen heard her and came carefully down, for in the morning both children's stockings were full. But you little people nowadays, who have so many toys, gay picture books, and French sweets, and no end of valuable gifts besides, will laugh when

I tell you what trifles gave those little ones of that household long ago so much pleasure. First, in the toes of the little stockings were a few sticks of candy, twisted tightly in paper, a package of blanched almonds, and raisins, and a dolly made of the doughnuts, with allspice eyes, cloves for ears and nose, and a raisin for the mouth; this was prized the most, and carried about all day; and I saw tears shed when one was broken, though comfort was found afterwards in a degree by the eating of it.

One more Christmas and I have done. This time I was in old London again, and it seemed busier and more full than ever—big folk, little folk, fat folk, thin folk, all seeming to vie with each other as to which could hurry over the ground the fastest. There seemed only one place in all that vast city where anyone stood still or where quiet reigned, and that was opposite the Marylebone Soup Kitchen, where groups of emaciated men, a few bedraggled and wan-looking women, and poor little ragged, shivering children, sat upon the curbstone, or leaned against the side of the building or a lamp post, waiting till some belated passer-by would of their plenty give them a penny to get a basin of soup. I had already given away a number of tickets to the man in charge of the place, but it being Christmas Eve, my heart was very pitiful toward the poor hungry creatures, though I had been told that the men were mostly drunkards, who only came there when they had no pence for the public-house. But as I passed along on the pavement I saw a poor little boy crouching near the wall to shield himself from the wind, looking so cold and miserable, and crying bitterly; so I spoke to him and gave him a sixpence. But just as I gave it to him, a tall, gaunt man reached his hand over us and snatched it from him, and before I had quite realised what had happened he had rushed at a mad pace quite out of sight. I was with a friend who knew more of the ways of London than I did, so she urged me to come away at once, or she said we would be mobbed, as by this time several grimy hands were extended in suppli-

cation to me; so I walked rather quickly, to be out of their way. But I earnestly hoped some braver spirit than mine would see that the poor little child got his supper before the night fairly closed in. It was very hard to think that in the very midst of such great wealth and comfort hundreds of poor creatures lay cold and unfed when such a trifle would help them.

Christmas morning came, but no bright sun awakened me, for it was foggy; and as we walked to church the fog seemed to penetrate even through our warm cloaks. We found the gas burning in the street, and though all lighted in the church, it seemed very poor and dim. But I forgot all about it in the beautiful service and grand singing, for I supposed the day would clear up later; but instead of doing so the fog became more dense than ever. As we walked home I could not but congratulate myself that I had not to go out to get my Christmas dinner, though several friends were to dine with us. As the hour for dinner approached we observed an anxious look upon the faces of the servants as they came and went about the house. We waited an hour, then another, for our expected guests, and after all our small party of three had to sit down alone; and we even could not have the satisfaction of grumbling, for there was the solemn footman handing dish after dish with as much solemnity as if our eight stranger guests were all there. It was bad indeed for us, but our poor friends had the worst of it, for they all had made the effort to come, and had driven round and round in the pitch darkness of the terrible fog, the gentlemen having even got out of their carriages and carried lights before the coachman. But all to no purpose, for at ten o'clock they found themselves back in the near neighbourhood of their own homes, and were thankful to refresh themselves with cold beef and mutton, and whatever good thing might be found in the larder. But as for a merry Christmas, few had really had it, for the elements had conspired together to prevent it; and almost all the dinner parties on that Christmas day ended more or less as ours had done.

POLITE ANSWERS TO IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS.

FEW of us would quite agree with Victor Cherbuliez when, speaking through the mouth of one of his characters, he tells us that "Rien n'est plus impertinent qu'une question, car répondre est toujours une fatigue et souvent un embarras"—"Nothing is more impertinent than a question—answering it is always fatiguing, and frequently embarrassing."

Too often, with persons of scanty ideas and meagre power of expressing themselves, a running fire of questions is the only way of keeping up conversation, while even with our greatest men, intelligent questions happily put have been known to act as an intellectual stimulus, and to issue in such brilliant outpourings as the world would not willingly lose.

At the same time, it is an indisputable fact that in our journey through life we are constantly exposed to a great many questions which are distinctly offensive. Unfortunately, too, it is not only with persons who are deficient in breeding, and strangers to the niceties of social life, that such questions are matter of daily occurrence—they may be put unwittingly by the very politest of people.

It is therefore of no little importance, if we would avoid on the one hand answering these questions, and on the other transgressing any of the laws of courtesy, that we should give some little thought to the different methods of dealing

with these objectionable experiences. It is easy enough, perhaps, to avoid answering an impertinent question when the circumstances are such that a polite snub is not undesirable or inadmissible. But when the necessity for refusing to answer coexists with a strong desire not to offend, then the difficulties in the way are very considerable. So indeed they are in those cases where the question has been prompted by no malicious feeling, and where it would seriously discompose the guiltless blunderers if their *gaucherie* were made evident.

Railery sometimes affords a valuable means of escape from the difficulties of the position, as when, for instance, one lady having been asked by another where she had bought her delicious fish, replied that she hadn't bought it at all. "The fishmonger, when he heard you were coming to lunch, presented it to me. Unlike Dr. Faustus, my fishmonger absolutely refused to sell his sole (soul)." As a matter of fact, the much lauded fish had come off the truck of an itinerant vendor of "Mackerel all alive, oh!" but motives of false shame made the lady interrogated dislike to avow this.

Everyone is familiar with the nursery formula for dealing with any indiscreet query as to a person's age. But people who would scarcely care to answer that they were as old

as their tongue and a little older than their teeth might with advantage borrow a hint from the young married woman, whose precise age had been a subject of much discussion before some friend, more daring than the rest, hazarded a point blank enquiry—"How old are you?" "How old am I!" she echoed gaily; "let me see. Why, with my new bonnet and best gown on I am only seventeen. On the other hand, when I swathe myself in a shiny mackintosh, and poise a deerstalker's cap on the back of my head, I am not a day younger than fifty. My actual age, as you know, is somewhere between those limits."

One other way of dealing lightly with this question as to age, when it is a woman who is victimised by it, is to say laughingly—"Oh, we women are supposed to be only as old as we look. You do not need to ask me, therefore; you have simply to look at me." Yet another way, likely to be popular with those who rejoice in a good French accent, and are pleased at any opportunity of displaying it, is to rattle off some appropriate French quotation, prefacing it with the statement that you don't see why people should ever want to know anybody's age, since—

"Aux âmes bien nées,
La valeur n'attend point le nombre des
années";

or you may remark, that when you die no one will be able to say of you, as the French poet did of the young girl—

"Et Rose, elle a vécu, ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin!"

Still another way is to answer with a touch of melancholy—"Alas! I am old enough to have been chief mourner at the funeral of many hopes," when the interrogator will probably feel that his or her question has set you on a track of sad reminiscences, and in curiously wondering what these dead and gone hopes can possibly have been will cease to speculate over your age. On the whole, however, a tone of cheerful banter best befits answers to the question, "How old are you?" and selection may be recommended from among the following: "Young enough to have preserved many illusions, one of which is, that a woman is always permitted to keep her years a profound secret"; or, "If I told my age to-day, ten years hence I might regret it"; or, "Women, like music, should never be dated"; or, "To tell you the truth, I have now arrived at that age when questions about age are always to be evaded." If the indiscreet friend persists further, and says, "But what age is that?" one has only to answer, "Why, the age that I am, to be sure," and so the discussion terminates in a circle.

While raillery, in many cases, is a very effective weapon, it must be sparingly used with those whose age, station, or intellect lift them above one's own level. Even with one's

equals, too, one may not always choose to resort to it. There are occasions when it is well to signify disapproval of an impertinent question, and to administer an unmistakable rebuff. But even then it is best to inflict the snub in a perfectly polite manner, so that the blame which attaches to the offender's rudeness may not also be extended to one's own curtness.

"Will you accept Captain Vavasour if he proposes to you?" said an illbred young girl to a friend of hers who had been singled out by the captain as the object of many attentions.

"My dear Celia," was the cutting reply, given in gentle but firm tones, "that is one of those questions which are seldom asked—" She paused, then added, with significant emphasis—"and never answered."

Nothing in its way could have been more admirable than this particular rejoinder, which in its cold reproof but absolute courtesy must have effectually put the flippant interrogator to the blush. This same answer, given in a slightly different tone, may be used too in those cases where the feelings of the person have to be considered. It is what one may call a colourless answer, which can be made to gently check or to harshly repress, according to the manner in which it is delivered.

Another colourless answer which can be returned to all questions, prefaced with an "If you will forgive my asking," is the following: "I could forgive you for asking, but not myself for answering." A slight modification of this same idea is to be found in the well-known rejoinder which a volatile

young widow elicited from a man of the world whom she had been pestering to answer a very indiscreet question.

"My dear Mrs. —," he cried; "the world pardons the woman who asks these questions, but not the man who answers them."

It is not a bad plan when anyone, by way of an afterthought, after putting an impertinent question, murmurs apologetically, "Pray don't tell me if you would rather not," to seize the offered road of escape, and to say, "I will be as frank as you are considerate—I would rather not."

Sometimes, too, the Yankee plan of meeting a question with a question can be successfully tried, and you may say, "What makes you ask?" when, if the reply be, "Oh, simply for curiosity," the answer, "So bad a reason doesn't deserve an answer," will be found to be very adequate.

But after the above simple hints everyone's own sagacity will be equal to discovering methods of politely answering impertinent questions, or, to be more accurate, methods of not answering them. I may remark, in conclusion, though, that just as much practice in exercise and gymnastics leads to ease in ordinary walking, so much taxing one's ingenuity over appropriate answers to hypothetical, silly, or impertinent questions will ensure great facility in dealing with the usual commonplaces of every-day inquisitorial blundering.

ADA HEATHER-BIGG.



MISCELLANEOUS.

FAIR MAID OF PERTH.—1. We can only suggest to you a plan which we have proposed to others. Pray daily for God's grace to curb your hasty temper; count sixty before you reply to what may have annoyed you; and should you be doubtful as to whether you either spoke or looked crossly, make an apology.—2. We do not advertise any kind of soap.

K. E. D.—1. Most clubs possess a few books, and all are anxious to form good libraries. But we do not think that all have them.—2. We are not acquainted with any club for women in Kensington. There is one in Soho which is not named in either of our articles on the subject.

GRACIE P.—1. We think the verses very amusing, but not poetry. We cannot say what you will be when you are "grown up" at all, but hope you will be good, the best of all things to become.

M. GREENLAW.—There are very few openings for companions. To be qualified for such a position a young woman should be very well educated and very well bred.

NORFOLK LASSIE.—Yes; *Noah's Ark* is published separately by Messrs. F. Warne & Co.

BLACK EYES.—For the method which we have given for making a serpent of postage stamps, see our new volume, "How to Make Common Things," p. 55. If you have the "G. O. P.," Vol. III., you will find the original Article, "More Occupations for Invalids," pp. 332 and 333.

LONG 31ST asks a question which is scarcely suitable, since she can learn all that we can tell her in the *History of Greece*. Alexander III. was surnamed "the Great" because he was a great conqueror. He was the son of Philip of Macedon, born at Pella B.C. 356, and his mother was Olympias, daughter of Neoptolemus, King of Epirus. He had a splendid education. Leonidas, Lysimachus, and Aristotle were his masters. He died of a drinking-bout after a few days' illness, B.C. 323, and was buried in a golden coffin at Alexandria by Ptolemy, and divine honours were paid to him in Egypt and in other countries. The sarcophagus in which the coffin was placed has been in the British Museum since 1802. Dr. E. D. Clarke published a dissertation upon it in 1805, having, through his exertions, had it surrendered to the English by the French Army.

A READER wishes to know of "any cure for sunken eyes." Certainly not. People are often born with small eyes, and we know of no method for bringing them forward. Nothing could be arranged behind them to give them prominence. But you may at least feel glad to reflect that little "pigs' eyes," lying deep in their sockets, are preferable to protruding eyes, which not only distress their owner but all who see them.

DAISY.—If you wish to know the difference of time between the various countries and principal cities of the world you should pay a visit to the Crystal Palace, take a note-book, and make entries of all, as they appear indicated on a dial or table in the astronomical department. Australia is our antipodes, or exactly the opposite side of the world to our own country. When it is noon here it is midnight there; when summer here it is winter there. You should study a manual of astronomy. We have published some illustrated books on the subject.

MINONETA.—1. In addressing a peeress you should put "The Countess of B.," not "Lady B.," unless the wife of a baronet or knight. If the wife of a baron, "The Lady B."—2. "Ogilvy" is accented on the first letter. The family derives its pedigree from the Mormaers of Angus, one of the seven great hereditary chiefs of Scotland, who in the 11th century exchanged that designation for the title of earl.

GOLENDDYDD.—The 40th, 43rd, 55th, and 60th chapters of Isaiah are thought to be the finest, we believe, but the imagery and poetry of the whole book are very grand.

MISS M. E. JONES.—We believe that the Ladies' Dress Reform Association has an office or representative at 22, Berners Street.