

A CAGE-MAKING WIFE.

By the Author of "How to be Happy Though Married."



OMAN in her time has been called upon to endure a great deal of definition. She has been described as "A good idea—spoiled!" This may be true of one who can only make a net to catch a husband, but it certainly is

not true of one who can make a cage to keep him in, of whom it might be said—

"Her air, her smile, her motions, told
Of womanly completeness;
A music as of household songs
Was in her voice of sweetness.

"Flowers spring to blossom where she walks
The careful ways of duty;
The hard stiff lines of life with her
Are flowing curves of beauty."

Men are often as easily caught as birds, but as difficult to keep. If the wife cannot make her home bright and happy, so that it shall be the cleanest, sweetest, cheerfulest place that her husband can find refuge in—a retreat from the toils and troubles of the outer world—then God help the poor man, for he is virtually homeless!

In the home, more than anywhere else, order is heaven's first law. It is the duty of a wife to sweetly order her cage so that it may be clean, neat, and free from muddle. Method is the oil that makes the wheels of the domestic machine run easily. The mistress of a house who desires order, and the tranquillity that comes of order, must insist on the application of method to every branch and department of the household work. She must rise and breakfast early, and give her orders early. Doing much before twelve o'clock gives her a command of the day.

The cause of many a man's ruin has been the muddle in his own house, the repulsiveness of his own fireside, so that he has been driven to find an appearance of cheerfulness in the inn and public-house. While he has been learning habits of dissipation that have culminated in the ruin of his body and estate, his wife, meanwhile, sitting at home "nursing her wrath to keep it warm," has become soured and chronically ill-tempered. A man must be a miracle of patience if, on returning from the fatigues of his daily labour, and finding a black fire, the sitting-room in a litter, his children squalling, and his wife vexed and annoyed at her incapacity to correct the muddle, he is not also touched with the like infirmity, and becomes fretful and impatient. "A clean, fresh, and well-ordered house exercises over its inmates a moral no less than a physical influence, and has a direct tendency to make the members of the family sober, peaceable, and considerate of the feelings and happiness of each other."

"Rub up your brasses, Sally," said a husband to a wife, who being, when first married, clean and orderly, was degenerating into a slattern, and failing to keep up appearances within the pretty cottage. Every wife may find "brasses to rub up;" and if her own spirits are gloomy enough at times, and things go wrong, she may at any rate keep the externals about her bright for the sake of husband and children.

"Brush your hair, and then things won't look so bad," was the homely advice given by an old friend to a woman whose husband had lost money by the failure of a bank, and who

could not see the force of the wife sitting untidy and dishevelled, with unswept floor and untidy hearth, and unprepared dinner, because this calamity had happened.

A friend of Robert Hall, the famous preacher, once asked him, regarding a lady of their acquaintance, "Will she make a good wife for me?"

"Well," replied Hall, "I can hardly say—I never lived with her!"

This is the real test of happiness in married life. It is one thing to see ladies on "dress" occasions, and when every effort is being made to please them; it is quite another thing to see them amidst the varied and often conflicting circumstances of household life. Men may talk in raptures of youth and beauty, wit and sprightliness, but after seven years of union not one of them is to be compared to good family management, which is seen at every meal, and felt every hour in the husband's purse. In the "Records of Later Life," Fanny Kemble (Mrs. Butler), shortly after she had begun housekeeping with a staff of six servants, writes from America to a friend, "I have been reproaching myself, and reproving others, and heartily regretting that, instead of Italian and music, I had not learned a little domestic economy, and how much bread, butter, flour, eggs, milk, sugar, and meat ought to be consumed per week by a family of eight persons." There is no reason why she should not have learned all this, and Italian and music as well.

Gradually it has come to be seen that practical cookery, which might be classed under the head of chemistry, is an excellent intellectual training, as it teaches the application in daily life of knowledge derived from a variety of branches of study. From this point of view even sweet girl-graduates may take pride in being good cooks, while as regards women of the working classes, hardly anything drives their husbands to drink so much as bad cookery and irregular meals. We cannot wonder that men desire to wash down with too much beer the badly-cooked clod of beef which some wives serve up day after day without any change. And as to unsettled meals, it is far easier to go for sixpennyworth of gin than to wait till an unpunctual wife has food prepared. Surely, a wife would vary her dishes a little, cook them up nicely, and have them hot, and to the minute, if she reflected how much her doing so might outwit the publicans! How true is the saying of Leigh Hunt, that "the most fascinating women are those that can most enrich the everyday moments of existence."

A woman should know when to change her rôle of housewife for that of the loving friend and companion of her husband. She should be able and willing to intelligently discuss with him the particular political or social problem that is to him of vital interest. We will all agree with Dr. Johnson that a man of sense and education should seek a suitable companion in a wife. "It was," he said, "a miserable thing when the conversation could only be such as whether the mutton should be boiled or roast, and probably a dispute about that." A good and loyal wife takes upon her a share of everything that concerns and interests her husband. Whatever may be his work, or even recreation, she endeavours to learn enough about it to be able to listen to him with interest if he speaks to her of it, and to give him a sensible opinion if he asks for it. In every matter she is helpful. If her husband be straitened in means by any sudden

loss of money, she takes her part of the anxiety and does what she can to lessen it; if there comes some unexpected family misfortune, she is ready and strong in standing up against it at his side; in every chance and emergency of life she is truly a helpmeet for him, never for a moment letting herself be treated as a pretty toy, or at best as a child who has no power and no capability to meet the storms and struggles of life.

Literary husbands and men of genius have sometimes had to complain that their wives became childishly jealous of their life-work. The philosopher of antiquity who would not raise his eyes for three years, lest they should rest upon a woman, had, no doubt, suffered from some woman's aggravating ways while he was trying to devote himself to the abstractions of philosophy. This is a common failing of common minds. A woman has torn the canvas from the easel where her husband was at work, in a fit of jealous rage; another, with grim determination, always chose the time when the author sat down to write to practise her scales or pound at some terrible sonata; and one (though such cruel malignity is scarcely credible) has been even known to hum a tune in the very room where her poet husband was striving to finish a beautiful and elaborate sonnet. And all this out of spite and jealousy for some fancied neglect!

Women's lives are often very dull; but it would help to make them otherwise if wives would sometimes think over, during the hours when parted from their husbands, a few little winning ways as surprises for them on their return, either in the way of conversation or of some small change of dress, or any way their ingenuity would have suggested in courting days. How little the lives of men and women would be dull if they thought of and acted towards each other after marriage as they did before it!

Certainly, it does a wife good to go out of her cage occasionally for amusement, although her deepest, truest happiness may be found at home. She, quite as much as her husband, requires change and recreation; but, while this is true, she must never forget that a life of pleasure is a life of pain, and that if much of her time is spent in visiting and company, anarchy and confusion at home must be the consequence. "Never seek for amusement," says Mr. Ruskin, "but be always ready to be amused. The least thing has play in it, the slightest word wit, when your hands are busy and your heart is free. But if you make the aim of your life amusement, the day will come when all the agonies of a pantomime will not bring you an honest laugh."

The song says that home is sweet, and that there is no place like it; but surely this depends upon the sort of home. There are homes that are no homes. The wife is the sun of the social system; unless she attracts, there is nothing to keep heavy bodies like husbands from flying off.

Milton tells us that a good wife is "Heaven's last, best gift to man." But what constitutes a good wife? Purity of thought and feeling, a generous, cheerful temper, a disposition ready to forgive, patience, a high sense of duty, a cultivated mind, and a natural grace of manner. She should be able to govern her household with gentle resolution, and to take an intelligent interest in her husband's pursuits. She should have a clear understanding, and "all the firmness that does not exclude delicacy," and "all the softness that does not imply weakness."