



"Perhaps it may turn out a song,
Perhaps turn out a sermon."



OCTOBER comes in royal guise, the misty haze on the hill-top lies, her gold and crimson banner flies, her dreamy spell has bound us; blue skies bend o'er the gleaming wood, and though the tribes are gone for good, we feel a certain likelihood of Indian summer round us. The birds, in many a restless through, their last "farewell forever" song repeat again and still prolong the moment of their going, to sing again once more their summer tunes of dewy morns and drowsy noons, of fragrant fields and rosy Junes, when apple boughs were snowing. White-handed children, sweet and fair, leave home at morn to wander where October's treasures here and there the nut-strewn ways have scattered, and in the evening's soft half-light creep slowly home in doleful plight, with face, hands and raiment, shocking sight, with walnut stain bespattered. Like autumn locusts, far and high, the coal chute's strident voice mounts high, the price soars upward to the sky, but goes without the dealer. The last lone "skeeter" lingering, still his maw with human gore to fill, is slapped to rest with vengeful skill by some unfeeling feeler. All up and down the noisy street the patriot men with marching feet turn out in thousands strong to greet the leaders of the nation; with voices hoarse as cawing jays they shriek wild strains of campaign lays, and roar their hip-hip-hoo-rays in howling jubilation. And all these trifles indicate what trusty diaries plainly state, that in her gorgeous robes elate and in her russet sober, with joyous hopes, with memories sad, with partings dreary, meetings glad, for weal or woe, for good or bad, the year has reached October.

THE DESERTER OF THE HOME

BUT there is one bright vision that has haunted you at times during the summer with restless forebodings, and with hope that spake the word of promise to the ear in June only to break it to the kitchen in October. One bright and joyous feature of the home circle at the time of its reunion does not materialize. Ellen Eliza, the hammerer of china, does not return when the swallows homeward fly. Slow downs the reluctant day, although it always gets up on time, however slow it may seem to our impatience, and wearily drag the hours along to sunset, but never the voice of her song comes waiving up the stairs in many a varied key of cheery shrillness, to mingle with the morning orisons of the family as they say their prayers before beginning their daily squabbles. No welcome brother comes, nor comes the more convenient cousin bearing her green box to the door to say that she will follow hard upon his coming. A weary search among her relatives in Legion country reveals the depressing, disheartening truth that Ellen Eliza has basely deserted you. And for what? This is the blow that breaks you down; this is the stab of Brutus. This, as you have heard Professor Prewnsanprisms say, is the ingratchichewed that wrecks your forchichewed.

INSULT UPON INJURY

SHE has accepted a position in a rag warehouse, a place where all her work is of the dust, dusty; a place which, in the heated, but usually accurate imagination of the American housekeeper, is fraught with all contagion from all the quarantines of reeking ports; from all the lazarettos of tropical islands of the multitudinous seas; from all pest houses and all plague hospitals under all burning suns. It is a favorite and widespread fiction—nay, I will not say fiction—I say, though you should try to drag the misleading and libelous word from my tongue with red-hot pincers and teams of horses, I say, I will not say fiction; I will say conviction; faith, positive knowledge, that's what I will say of the American housekeeper, that dealers in rags, proprietors of paper mills, manufacturers of fine lines of stationery, will search the world over and pay fabulous prices to agents and commissioners to secure for their trade, rags from pestilential lands and plague-swept districts. Nay, have we not reason to know, can we not prove, were it not that proof is far less convincing than conviction, that where the paper manufacturer hears of the cholera there with all speed he sends his trusty and confidential buyer; when the fatal message thrills the cable with the black news that yellow fever rages in a foreign land, he straight suborns consular agents and resident merchants to secure for him the coveted deal in rags; and when he hears that the dreaded black death is slaying its tens of thousands he hastily packs his valise, kisses his wife and babies, and saying that he can trust no one but himself to secure the rags of these favored patients, flies to the bounteous land of plenty, lest some commercial rival more active than himself shall secure the coveted prize. Do we not know full well what is an American rag warehouse? Proofs? We need no proofs; we know it. It has always been so; it was so when Adam was a tailor and Eve made her own dresses. You ask any housekeeper, if you don't want to believe me.

LOOK ON THIS PICTURE

AND it is for such a place as this that Ellen Eliza has left your home. Your home! Think of that. This is a wound that "smarts to be remembered." This would humble you down to the dust if it didn't make you too mad to speak. Why, look at it. On this side your home, in soft back ground and fair middle tints; your home, that is envied, most lovingly coveted, by the friends who are favored to frequent it. A palace in miniature; a dream of perfect taste, of elegant refinement; its very atmosphere is a perfume of well-ordered neatness. Your husband, a man among a thousand, educated, distinguished in the little circle that is honored by his presence and condescension—truly, heaven was good to send you such a man; he was the last one of that lot; he was a bargain, he was. And your children, those wingless cherubs; ah, the darlings, how can any one look at them and keep the tears back from their eyes? They are beautiful indeed, and as good as they are fair. And one must say this for you because your sweet humility will not permit you to say it yourself. So gracious are you, and so easy with your "help." Your kitchen is a real parlor; your work arranged with special regard to the servant's comfort; everything about the kitchen arranged to the Queen's taste, Ellen Eliza, the XLVIII; her own room, airy, cool, even dainty, a gem of comfort and neatness; and then your light service, your easy requirements, your generous thoughtfulness for your servant's needs; company allowed every Thursday evening—one whole evening in the week when she may converse and hold social intercourse with others of her kind and station; the long evening to begin after work is done and close at ten o'clock; a holiday every month and every other Sunday afternoon if she will return in time to prepare the evening meal. Such a home as that is offered to very few "girls," let me tell you. Surely Ellen Eliza must have lost her senses to have given up such comforts as your house afforded her.

THEN ON THAT

AND on the other hand, what? Behold the place to which Ellen Eliza has gone from your home. A rag warehouse; nasty, dusty, dirty, disease-y, smelly—pah! "Look on this picture, then on that!" Hyperion to a satyr; Ariel to Caliban; Paradise to Purgatory. Ellen Eliza, where are you? Where do you stand? Ah, you are looking too high, dear madam; you will never see Ellen Eliza if you keep on straining your neck looking up toward the clouds. It is quite natural that you should think, in fact, that you should know—it is much the same thing, under ordinary circumstances, but sometimes it is different—that when your lovely home and charming family are placed in one plate of scales and the rag warehouse in the other, that there could be but one result. I know; but sometimes it is the other one. Didn't you feel something kind of bounce when Ellen Eliza stepped on the scales? Yes; well, that was your charming family, and your distinguished husband, and your lovely home, and your own crowning self kicking the beam. Here, away down here—can you see them?—as far down as the counter will let them go, is Ellen Eliza and the rag warehouse. There she is, where all her work is of the rag, raggy, but where it begins at seven A. M., when the whistle blows, and ends at six P. M., when it blows again, with an hour at noon; where she has every evening in the week, all the company she wants and as long as she wants it; fifty-two Sundays in the year all for her own self, to pass as her inclination and conscience may suggest; regular hours and all the legal holidays without asking anybody, just the same as the men, for all the world just like the men! False Ellen Eliza, this is worse, this is more basely ungrateful, this is more preposterously unheard of than getting married! And that is a crime in a good "domestic." Why is it? Why, because it is. You ask any housekeeper; she knows.

LO HERE! LO THERE

FOLLOWS then an interim of experimental work with Ellen Eliza XLIVth to LXIVth, a time of weariness of the flesh and vexation of spirit. It leaves your wearied body and bewildered brain in the whirlpool of the unsolved question which has worried womankind ever since Hagar, the handmaid, ran away from Sarai, the mistress, nearly 4,000 years ago somehow preferring the desolation of the wilderness of Shur to doing general housework in a small family with no children. You are worn out in a struggle with hand-maids who do not know how to light a fire, wind a clock or propel a sweeper; with cooks who cannot cook and who are firmly convinced that man was made to live upon baker's bread served stale and canned meats served cold. Some go far enough and stay long enough to cast a glance of scorn at the room where they are expected to sleep, and retire without a word. Others give one crushing look at your charming family and fly back to the intelligence office, and some, still more considerate, remain in your household long enough to break what few bits of fragile ware Ellen Eliza the preceding may have thoughtlessly overlooked.

THE MAN TO THE RESCUE

NOT many days of this suffices to worry, or I would not say worry, nor yet irritate, because that most excellent man, who is the light and life of the circle which is distinguished and honored by his gracious presence, is not irritable—but he begins to develop symptoms of melancholy; he becomes pensive like; there is a pathetic intonation in his voice; he—he kind of, oh, well, what he says is this: "Good land! What is this place? Castle Garden? Are you running an Immigration Bureau in the kitchen? I can get more men in ten minutes than I can use in six months, and if a woman wants to hire one girl she makes more fuss than the Homestead strike, and then doesn't do anything. Here; gimme the address of that intelligence office and I'll bring you home a girl." You meekly remind him that he mustn't call it an intelligence office, but Mutual Domestic Service Bureau. "'Tis, hey?" he says, with bitter scorn. "I'll take some of the starch out of 'em. They won't have any woman to fool with when I get hold of 'em." He pauses on the doorstep to say: "I'll leave the office early to-day, and will be home about half-past four. I'll bring a cook and a second girl with me. Hear?" And he walks away with the haughty air of a business man who daily roars at an office boy, scolds a typewriter, and bullies a book-keeper, to say nothing of firing a porter every time he gets real mad.

THE EAGLE IN THE DOVE COTE

HIGH in the air is his imperial head as he stalks away, lofty is his commanding glance as he enters his office, a Gulliver among the Lilliputians. Hard lines for the typewriter that day, for he is bitter against her sex, and he'll show her. Woe is her if in swift dictation she spells Caspar Jodel's name with a Y. "Wah! don't you know anything? Gimme that letter! Here! I can write it in half the time you can take it." All the long morning he keeps up his rage and dignity and peremptoriness against the Mutual Domestic Service Bureau by practising upon her. Off she retires behind the copy sheet, sometimes to weep, anon to make faces at him. The book-keeper gets so nervous—"rattled" he tells the shipping clerk—by ten o'clock that he can't add up a column of figures in one syllable. The office boy, with the caution and instinct of his kind, keeps out of the way when he isn't wanted, and receives his orders at long range when he is summoned, relieving his feelings by vigorous pantomime in the hall, as oft as he gets roared out of the office, and the unfortunate porter is discharged every time he comes in sight, but he is used to it. When that man at last sets out, with a high head and a defiant heart for the Mutual Domestic Service Bureau, it is the destroying march of Attila. Weep, oh maids of the many colored raiment; lift up the voice and howl in the fancied security of that little back room where ye hold awful and mysterious court, for the Avenger of Man is on your track! Lo, where he comes, the air smokes and the ground is black.

THE LAMB AMONG WOLVES

HE enters the precincts of the bureau. Black is his brow, and rasping with unwonted harshness is his voice. Sternly he bends his gaze upon the superintendent. She lifts her own eyes a passing moment to meet his ferocious expression, tranquilly, as one who had been weaned in early infancy on just such glances from much larger men. She resumes her writing. There is something in the atmosphere of this strange place that chills him. He snorts "Goodaftnoon!" in one word, and in the same tone in which he had snarled "Gmorn!" to his typewriter. The superintendent looks up pleasantly and says: "Good afternoon, sir," with excessive courtesy and just a little Boston icing on it. He breaks into a cold perspiration as the horrible thought sweeps across his mind that she may have followed him there to witness the battle. He looks over his shoulder as a murderer might look around at the ghost. He would give a dollar if the office boy would just come after him with a message. He knocks his head off. His tongue cleaves to the sun-burned roof of his kiln-dried mouth. He takes off his hat. He prefers a request for an interview with a lady who might be willing to accept a situation to assist in general housework. The lady is presented. "An' how many hav yez in the family?" "Five." He is alone. He hears an unfamiliar voice beyond the partition saying, as to an audience: "Thayre's a house full o' thim." He suggests, in a hoarse, strange voice, that he will try for two. They are summoned. The candidate for cook is taller than himself; the "sicking gyurl" demands of him where he lives. He names the street. The two ladies turn to look into each other's faces; two harsh and hollow bursts of laughter grate upon the startled air; two faces look down upon him with pitying commiseration, and he is once more alone. He goes out like a man walking in his sleep. He falls over a dog and "begs pardon." He meets the office boy and lifts his hat to that astonished young rebel. He sees his typewriter waiting for a car, and calls a hansom for her. He reaches home and when the "ad interim" Ellen Eliza opens the door, he calls her "Madam," and apologizes for troubling her. You say: "Where is the new girl?" He says: "Oh? Didn't have time to go for her." And he is correct. She went for him. After this, perhaps, you had better not say anything to him about it.

Oh, patient, much-enduring, long-suffering woman, no man living knows upon what heart-aches and trials and tribulations of the flesh and the spirit his happy home is founded. If he did he couldn't sleep in it. Sometimes he can't anyhow, but that isn't what keeps him awake. It's one thing and another.

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