

SOME RULES OF NEATNESS.



PLACE for everything, and everything in its place.' 'Clear as you go.' 'You'll not beat those rules, Miss Eta, but I am afraid you won't heed them either. You never were the least bit tidy. Oh, dear! oh, dear! when you have a house of your own I expect there'll be a nice muddle.'

So said Mrs. Pike, the nurse of our early days, promoted as we grew up to be my mother's confidential maid and housekeeper: a very privileged person.

There was a great deal of truth in what she said, but I hardly relished it the more on that account, especially as just then a home of my own was much in my thoughts. In a few months afterwards I was married to a barrister with a limited number of briefs and a small income. We came to live in London; and it was only when I had left it that I realised the full value of the comfort and order that reigned in the home of my childhood. My father had a small estate and kept a fairly good establishment, where, as is mostly the case in houses of the kind, everything seemed to go with the regularity of clock-work. Each servant had his or her duties clearly defined, and they were numerous enough to make my sister and myself very useless members of society, quite unaccustomed to wait on ourselves.

When I married I gave up a maid at once, and even in my honeymoon spoilt, or at all events took off the freshness of several dresses, by bad packing. I missed her far more, however, when I was fairly settled in my new home. I wasted more valuable half-hours than I liked to reckon up in hunting for lost gloves, lost ribbons, studs, and similar trifles, which had a knack of getting out of the way.

I was scarcely twenty, and utterly inexperienced. Happily I was not ashamed to own it, so that when telling Mrs. Pike some of my troubles, she suggested coming to the house and devoting a day to setting my *ménage* thoroughly to rights, I gladly availed myself of the offer.

"This is your room, ma'am; not a bad one either. It's so cluttered up, that's what makes it so small. You might get rid of all those paper boxes by having one of the champagne-cases, which I know the master sent you, covered with chintz, stuffed with a little flock at the top, and hinges added. We've such a one in the Blue Room at the Grange. It will hold four hats or bonnets at the bottom, and with a tray four more at the top. There isn't much carpentering required. The tray is only four laths nailed together and a criss-cross of tape. You must put a bit of wood on either side of the box inside to support this. There are two of those cases, I know. I should cover the other one just the same, only I should put a couple of hinges to the front of it as well, and brass hooks and eyes to fasten it; then if you fill it with boxes of head-

dresses, ribbons, &c., by letting down this front you can see in a moment which one you want, and get at it without taking them all out. Excuse me, ma'am, but haven't you more boots and shoes in wear than needs be? They don't look altogether tidy, and the dust they'll get grained into 'em, lying in a heap under the dressing-table! Dust is the most prolific and the most active thing I know of, and the most harmful. A fender-stool on the hearth-rug wouldn't be a bit in your way, and if it were made to open, and just deep and wide enough, you might keep them all in it, and handy to get at too."

I pleaded that I can't afford to buy anything for the house at present.

"Ah, well! we'll see if the missis won't send you one. But, anyway, there's that nice wardrobe with a fair-sized door. If you get a bit of chintz or ticking just the size, lay strips of the same across to make a lot of pockets, bind it all with red braid and hang it up against the door inside, it'll take no room hardly, and will hold all the boots and shoes; and all this wool I see is over from the antimacassar you sent Mr. George for his rooms at college, as well as the extra pieces I made them send with your trousseau dresses, and lots of odds and ends besides.

"Odds and ends! lawk a mercy, ma'am, this is a drawer of odds and ends; they say how these sort of things tell what a lady's house is to be. It is to be hoped Mr. Grey has never peeped in, or he might have wished he'd seen it a few months ago."

I laugh to hide a blush, and we proceed together to tidy drawers and wardrobes and the room generally. It takes a long time, but the lost treasures I find quite repay me. I learn that I have more linen in use than I want; that it is being unfairly worn. I am told to keep each article in separate heaps, the last from the wash at the bottom. It takes longer than I quite like to own to find a button or so, to replace missing ones.

"You must have a proper mending basket, ma'am—a good-sized one, with pockets for buttons, cottons, tapes, darning-thread, and all that. Why, there was just such a one among your wedding presents, black and gold, with a blue quilted satin cover, which would hide anything that might be in it, if you liked to have it in the drawing-room. I'd move this table into the window, and put an ink-bottle, with pen-tray attached, upon it, and the writing-case Miss Ellen gave you. I mean the new holland one with a bunch of painted flowers outside, and bound with red leather. It had four pockets at one end for paper, envelopes, and stamps, so no stationery-case would be wanted. Every bed-room must have writing things in it. You never saw one without at the Grange, I know. Those bills will all be lost, left about like that. Missis has straps for them, with slips of polished wood on both sides, to keep them from curling up—one for paid, the other for unpaid—and each bill has the name and date

written on the outside. You'll be having to pay some of them again if you don't take care."

We turn into my husband's dressing-room.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, Mr. Grey sets you an example here. This match-box ought to be in its place, though; and it would take up much less room if this bath was set up against the wall. It wants, I see, a thick square of flannel bound with red, to lay down when it is used. It's cold work standing with damp feet on the oil-cloth. You're looking tired, ma'am. It must be pretty well lunch-time; that will give you a little rest, and we can finish up afterwards."

"It's past one, but I don't know when we shall get lunch; sometimes it's at one, sometimes it's at two o'clock."

"Begging your pardon, it oughtn't to be so. If I were you I should get some of those pretty cards bordered with painted flowers, and hang them up all over the house, showing the hours of meals and post-times clearly written down. You'll see them, and the servants will too, and it's astonishing how, if they find the mistress neat and particular, they learn they must be the same. Missis brought some down new from London last year, and the ladies and gentlemen as have been staying at the Grange since have certainly been more punctual both at prayers and lunch."

"I'd rather finish what we are about before I think of lunch," I venture to suggest.

"Not if it's really the time for lunch, ma'am. It is generally a difficult matter to leave what you are doing for meals or drives or anything else that has to be done, but depend on it, it's a great rule of neatness not to go on with any employment longer than duties permit. I expect when you get at your painting you're not always dressed for dinner in time."

It was quite true, and I found Harry seemed more put out at my frequently keeping him waiting for dinner, than by my many other failings in matters of order and neatness. I do not feel obliged to own this, however, for at that moment lunch is announced, and I notice Mrs. Pike turns a look of disapproval on the servant as she goes away.

"Half-past one, ma'am, and Sarah not changed her dress. Don't you allow that; nothing looks worse than an untidy maid going to the door, and you should make it a positive rule that she is dressed when she lays the lunch."

I venture to suggest that she has not always got through her dirty work.

"You'll find she can have, if you just make out a list of what rooms are to be cleaned daily, and have them done in the morning, one each day. There is no difficulty for early people like yourselves; Mr. Grey, I know, leaves every morning at nine."

When lunch is over and Mrs. Pike comes to find me in the drawing-room, she draws my attention to the fact that the fire is lower than it ought to be.

"You should have it made up after breakfast, before lunch, when the five o'clock tea comes and before

dinner, and there need be no tinkering between whiles. Make Sarah put on a good supply of coals, throw up all the ashes at the top, and sweep up the grate well each time, and you always look tidy and have a good fire. There used to be a saying when I was a girl, 'A smiling welcome, a neat hearth, and a good dinner keep a husband fond.' The best of 'em like their creature comforts attended to, and it's true enough."

I have barely time to dress for dinner after Pike goes, for we spend the afternoon making lists of the glass, china, and household linen, lining the shelves for the latter with paper and labelling it all—the sheets with the room to which they belong, the table-linen as to size.

"What a few table-napkins there are!"

I explain that it requires a large supply to have clean ones daily, and that my husband dislikes rings, and likes to see them folded properly every day.

"That's all very well, but you'll find your washing bills heavy. Just you take a needful of red cotton when you give them out, and put an 'E' in loose stitches on yours, and an 'H' on his; this will distinguish the two; let them be damped with the table-cloth and put in the press, and until they are really soiled they will look fresh to the end."

That day taught me a wealth of practical knowledge. I had enjoyed the results of orderly management and punctuality at home, but I never before realised how they were brought about. It did not come at all easy at first to carry out what I had learnt, but after repeated failures I succeeded. I found the whole comfort of the house depended on my forethought and management; that servants worked well under my supervision, badly without it.

At first I fell into the error of attaching too much importance, and giving too much time, to what really after all are trifles, important as they are—"the sum of human things," Hannah More tells us. My husband proved a valuable mentor here and showed me, by a kindly given hint now and then, that by doing what had to be done at once, and not allowing the mind to dwell on it too long, it was carried out and dismissed, and leisure secured for other things—viz., according to Mrs. Pike's homely phrase, by clearing up as you go, and having a place for everything. How much time is lost hunting for things mislaid! Frequent visits to the Grange taught me to adopt in my small household the same order and method as in a large establishment. There, as in military matters, order and regularity are the life and soul of everything, securing not only comfort, but elegance.

We are in many ways returning to those days when ladies did not disdain to enter personally into domestic details—a step in the right direction, and a reaction from the very opposite course encouraged by modern luxury. Still it is well to remember that there are two kinds of tidiness—one that, hidden from sight, makes itself felt by a pervading sense of completeness; the other too painfully evident, rendering everything trite, cold, and stiff.