

OTHER PEOPLES' SERVANTS.



WAS sitting one day, in Paris, in the delightful apartments of a well-known writer; and as we chatted pleasantly about literary matters in various countries, a tall and rather good-looking French valet occasionally entered the room and departed from it, as the service of his master and the care of the usual French fireplace with burning logs required. His appearance was so picturesque, with his well-cut profile handsomely set off by tightly curling Byronic ringlets, with his sleeved waistcoat (for he wore no coat), his immaculate white necktie, and his long linen apron reaching to his feet, that when the door closed behind him on one occasion I said to our host—

“Are French valets the delightfully clever creatures they were in your father’s time, when, as he has shown in his novels, they did the bravest sort of things, and said the wisest and the wittiest?”

“Ah, no,” answered the great *littérateur*, “French valets are no longer brave; they are no longer witty; they are no longer wise; they are no longer anything but thieves.”

He thereupon proceeded to give the present generation of French male servants a left-handed “*carakter*,” which was highly amusing, and brought up the condemnation to a humorous climax with the real skill of a word-artist. Our peals of laughter were interrupted by the reappearance of the man, and again I noted that in outward semblance, at least, this thieving, witless, senseless, inefficient valet was the very beau-ideal of a gentleman’s servant.

But, during my entire stay in Paris, I heard on all sides the same story repeated concerning French servants. If ladies and gentlemen of veracity residing in France were to be believed, the whole race of French domestics are fit subjects for transportation to New Caledonia! Since the fall of the Empire their obstreperousness has become something incredible. In addition to laziness, theft, and bad personal character in respect of morals, these reprehensible creatures are of different shades of political belief, and often attempt to repeat, amidst the respectable surroundings of the kitchens of gentlefolks, the wild disputes and hideous orgies of the Commune. On one occasion a certain friend of mine was obliged to send for the gendarmes, to quell the political row going on in her kitchen between Marie from Belleville, and Jacques from Alsace, and the “sergeants of the city” found the belligerents engaged in a real duel, the weapons of which were heavy saucepans, the poker, and the monster soup-kettle used for the decoction of that nutritious national broth, the *pot au feu*.

Now, I do not present these matters in a spirit of chuckling satisfaction that we in England are, at least, exempt from annoyances such as this from our

servants. When the French satirist said that there was something not displeasing to us in the misfortunes of our dearest friends, the implied sneer upon humanity was less bitter than is generally supposed. He did not mean, I feel convinced, that we do not love our friends less, only we love ourselves more. Such terrible catastrophes being possible to the human race, as we learn from the recital of their occurrence to our friends they are, why, then the grain of comfort to be extracted from the knowledge is that we have reason to be thankful these particular troubles have not happened to us. We are not glad because our dearest friends suffer. None but a Machiavelli would assert such a thing. But our gratitude that we have escaped similar misfortunes is somewhat markedly accentuated, that’s all.

So when I hear English ladies railing at the domestic service-givers of this country, pronouncing them the most impudent, inefficient, presuming creatures under the sun, I always feel disposed to open upon these complainers the volleys of my knowledge concerning other peoples’ servants, in order to show them that, instead of complaining of English servants, they ought to be extremely thankful for them. For, whatsoever they may be at present, howsoever much they may have fallen off from the standard of excellence required by our ancestors of theirs, the fact nevertheless remains that English servants are still the best servants in the world. People who have travelled in many countries know this, and all of us who are such travellers know it, and say it too whenever we get an opportunity.

I grant you English servants are not for submissiveness what they have been even in our own day. The time is past when a servant will submit, for instance, to be dictated to concerning what she shall wear when she is not performing service. Yet I always thought such interference on the part of mistresses the pettiest and most undignified tyranny. It may be well that the servants in the house of a family of high rank should be forced at all times to comply with certain regulations in respect to clothing. This is one of the forms of pomp and circumstance which, it may be, nobility obliges. But for the wife of the moderately successful City man, or pecunious trader, to expect women servants to crush out the feminine instinct for jaunty attire, and to compel them to wear a regulation garb of servanthood at all times and seasons, is unfair, unkind, and is a tyranny which in one way or another will be revenged by the victim. It is a sort of despotism I never practised myself, though I have been an employer of servants since the matronly age of eighteen. And I remember distinctly how about that time (though it is long ago) my most respectable and aged upper servant—a woman of fifty, if a day—came into my room one morning, holding a sort of fanciful leaf composed of black silk and lace, the ostensible purpose of which was to represent an apron. “Have you any objection, mum,” she said demurely

and anxiously, "to my wearing this?" "Why, no, Stanway," I answered promptly; "wear what you like." My sense of justice rebelled, even at that youthful age, against a mere girl like myself dictating to this aged woman concerning so entirely personal a matter as her wearing apparel.

Do we require more labour of the servant of to-day than our forefathers did of the domestics who waited upon them? I think we do. The justifiable anxiety for exceeding cleanliness in our houses and our persons is a matter whose origin dates back comparatively only a few years. Our remote ancestors had not a trace of the Mussulmaniac instinct for ablution which characterises the "tubbers" of to-day.

Elderly housekeepers too, though much disposed to cast a roseate glamour over the days when they were in their prime, sometimes confess that the scrubbing, window-washing, and brass-polishing done so constantly now in all cleanly households, were operations less frequent then. To me there is something savage in forcing a servant to perform more laborious drudgery than her physical system can safely endure. To overwork a servant, to make of any of God's creatures a "slavey," is a sin I shall never have on my conscience. Rather than that, I will pay the wages of another servant, though I give up the dulcet strains of opera and concert for a dozen seasons; though I be new-bonnetless, tour-on-the-Continentless for a half-decade; or even should my brasses go unpolished and my windows uncleaned, though that contingency I confess is a dire one. But anything, any sacrifice will I endure rather than suffer the remorse of seeing the pale, drawn face of an overworked housemaid, wearily trudging up the long staircase for the hundredth time (or thereabouts) since morning, bearing some heavy burden in her tired arms. Some people are very inconsistent in their fashion of treating man and beast. I have known gentlemen who would go to brilliant assemblages in a cab, or at best a hired coach, so that their cattle might be comfortably housed from the fog and rain, but whose compassion was a thing of adamant when the human hirelings of their household were concerned.

Fully to appreciate the average excellence of English servants, and to understand how well waited upon as a nation English people are, we should go abroad and study domestic service in other countries. We have seen what my Parisian friend says of French valets. If a person of the social standing and the ample fortune of this great writer cannot find a good servant in France, who can? The custom which prevails in England, by which persons even of the highest rank may without derogation to their dignity go into shops, ask for what they want, and see that they get it, has no parallel in France. A great outcry is raised here against the practice (made a demand, it is said, by some servants) to be allowed to pay bills. Such a practice may develop into a great abuse, certainly, but as yet it is not a very wide-spread custom. It principally affects either very rich people, who are so lazy they will not take the trouble to go about and pay bills, or else those shady customers from whom it is so diffi-

cult to get payment, that a tradesman is willing enough to give a percentage to the servant who has managed to effect a settlement. But in France it is imperative that your money for tradesmen should all go through the servants' hands. The usual custom with French housekeepers is to give the cook a certain sum each morning, and then on the next morning receive her verbal account as to how she has disposed of it. Sometimes it is required that the veracious cuisinière should supplement her narrative by presenting vouchers, and a few grimy and nearly illegible tradesmen's bills serve the purpose. But they support her statement, of course, and the mistress has no redress, for the tradesmen will be sure to sustain the cook, should an inquiry be made. They are in league, and play into each other's hands. "To make the handle of the market-basket jump" is the proverbial form in which the cheater of cooks has passed into their language.

But for utter badness beyond, I truly believe, all other civilised countries on earth, the servants of the United States must be awarded the crown. I kept house in New York for several years, and my experience was that of almost all other householders; life was a burden to me on account of the insolence and inefficiency of the servants. To rid myself of the torture, I did what thousands of American families do each year, I sold out my furniture at a terrible sacrifice, let the house I owned at a ruinous rent (anything to be rid of it!) and removed into one of the luxurious monster hotels for which New York is famous, where, if I could not be said to enjoy any home-feeling, at least I had peace. I could fill the Magazine from cover to cover with the recital of the insults I have endured from New York servants, and the exasperating story of their inefficiency, untidiness, presumption, and outrageous demands of every sort. The bulk of these servants, I regret to say, are Irish, but what sort of Irish? The most ignorant of the female population of the Irish seaports and the bogs, thoroughly unacquainted with the simplest details of household service, their knowledge of cookery being confined to roasting a potato in the cinders, or baking a cake on a hot stone, their ideas of cleanliness such as might be expected from the inhabitants of mud hovels, whose co-lodger is the pig. Ignorant as they are, they are eagerly engaged as soon as they arrive at New York, by well-to-do families who are willing to pay them high wages, and grant them many hitherto undreamed-of privileges in return for only fairly satisfactory domestic service. It frequently happens that American ladies who have been on a summer tour in Europe will, while returning across the ocean, leave the saloons of the steamer, and visit the steerage for the purpose of effecting the engagement of such household servants as they will require when they return to New York. The trouble with these emigrants is, first, that they know nothing; and secondly, that they are all under the influence of relatives or friends who have been established for some time in America, and who initiate the new-comers instantly into the devious ways of servant-galhood in the land they live in. The first principle instilled into the minds of the new-comers is that they are quite the

equal of any lady in the land, now that they have shaken the dust of the "ould country" off their feet, and that their conduct must be self-asserting accordingly. They are not slow to act on the hint. One day I was sitting in my drawing-room in New York, engaged in writing, when my little sister put her head in and said there was a "girl" outside who had come to see about the place, "girl" being the euphemism applied to "servants," an appellation which is far from popular in the great Republic. The coming of the girl was in response to a visit I had made in the morning to the "Intelligence Office," a name chosen perhaps in mockery for the Servants' Registry Office of the neighbourhood. This "girl"—a hard-faced, big-boned woman of thirty-five or more—pushed herself uninvited into my presence, and standing in the doorway and staring about the rooms as if taking disdainful observation of their contents, occupied herself for a space of time with the lowering of a blue silk parasol, very dirty and faded. When the operation was leisurely concluded, without a word being spoken on either side, she swung herself over to a remote part of the room, where a particularly commodious easy-chair was standing, and throwing herself down into it, flung one arm comfortably over the chair-arm, and said roughly, "F'what wagis d'yes give here?" I am almost ashamed to confess that after some parley, in which she was the questioner, and I seemed to be constantly shaping my replies in a way to meet her approval, I engaged this insolent creature, and that neither I, nor my husband, nor my sister then thought there was anything extraordinary in my doing so; but that we all congratulated ourselves upon our having got that rare prize, a servant of some sort, is the amplest proof of the martyrdom

housekeepers suffer in New York. A few weeks' patient struggle with this Gorgon convinced me that there was no use trying to keep the peace with her, and that she must be discharged. Her noise and volley of insults on leaving brought the neighbours to their windows in dismay. Her successor was a fat negress, with her head tied up in a bandanna handkerchief, and her great black toes issuing from her well-worn "valises"—again to quote the Christy Minstrels in their appropriate substitute for the word "shoes"—and she was even worse than the old Irishwoman.

The Irish and the negroes are not the only races employed in households in America. Norwegians, Danish, Germans, Welsh, and Scotch all emigrate by the thousand, and all are gladly welcomed. Few, indeed, are those who prove satisfactory to their employers; the reason of this being, I fancy, that servants, when thoroughly efficient workers, never lack employment in the land of their birth, and have no need to cross the seas to earn their bread. The Americans are now trying the Chinese, who make patient "helps," but have certain peculiarities which render them offensive to white people.

It is not alone in the United States that the servant question is a social plague. It is equally unsettled in British America; and as for Australia, the servant who dons her habit and goes out for a nice gallop on a pony, while her mistress stays at home and cooks the dinner, is a proverb. The objection to native servants, in all the semi-civilised colonies of Great Britain, is that they have an unpleasant habit of murdering the family occasionally, which is generally considered a drawback even by persons of the most liberal views.

OLIVE LOGAN.

SUMMER CLIMATES FOR INVALIDS.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



TO an invalid who can bear it, the advantages of travel itself—of change of air, change of scene, change of faces, and change of thought—are, in many long-standing

and chronic cases of illness, simply incalculable. From the very moment that an invalid makes up his mind to try a change of air, the cure of his ailment may often be said to date. Not only does hope—that blessed medicine which, you know, I am so

fond of prescribing—take up its abode in his breast, but even the little bustle and excitement inseparable from the preparations to be made for the journey, act as a gentle stimulant, if not indeed as a tonic itself, and send the blood dancing more quickly through the veins than it has done perhaps for many months.

Travelling is, nowadays, so comfortable and so cheap that it is almost within the reach of every one; and it is pleasant to know that, for those who cannot afford to go abroad, there are climates in our own country to suit nearly every disease of a chronic nature. Remember, however, that there is no *perfect* climate anywhere in this world, that every place has one or two little drawbacks; the invalid, then, should look well before he leaps; and before he makes up his mind in the choice of any particular locality, let him be perfectly certain that it is suited to the nature of his complaint, or he may be disappointed in the result.

Under no circumstances ought a sufferer to seek relief in a change of climate without first consulting his own medical adviser; and to any one who means to try the benefit of a change, I must say emphatically