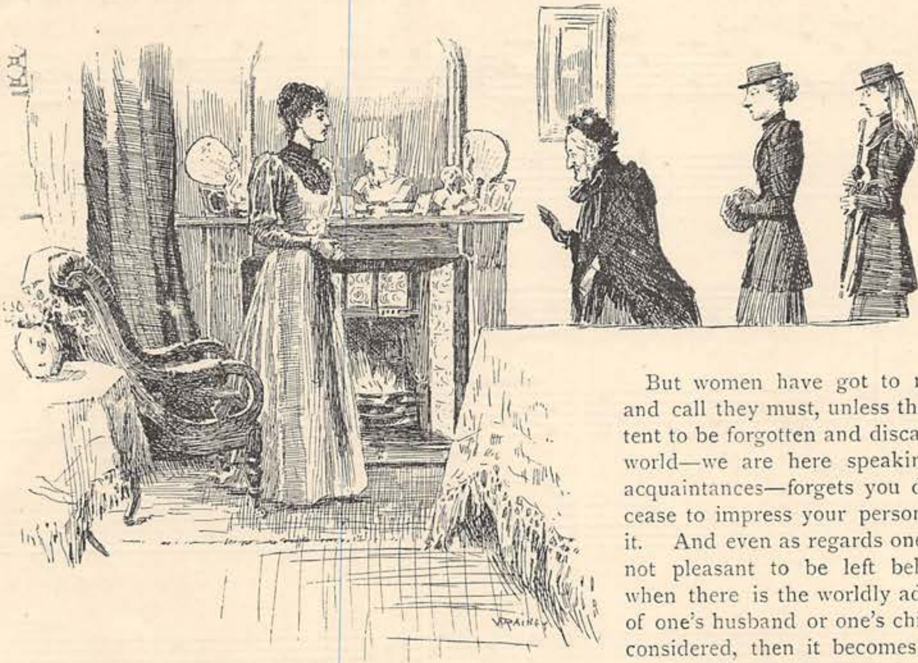
THE SOCIAL DUTY OF WOMEN.

I.—THE AFTERNOON CALL.



"WOMEN HAVE GOT TO MAKE CALLS."

"THE LOVE OF CALLING IS NOT INDIGENOUS."

THE principal and most laborious social duty of women is calling.

There is no doubt that the London woman who performs properly all her obligations in this respect, and who is not fortunate enough to command any other carriage than an omnibus (alas! how many of us come under this category), must sacrifice all her available spare time. Women are great victims. It may be only a silken chain that most of us wear, but it galls, all the same. Even to the sociably-inclined among us, calling must often seem a great waste of time; while as to the unsociably-inclined—well, if a London woman be unfortunate enough to dislike both calling and shopping, it were indeed "better for her that she had never been born."

But women have got to make calls, and call they must, unless they are content to be forgotten and discarded. The world—we are here speaking only of acquaintances—forgets you directly you cease to impress your personality upon it. And even as regards one's self, it is not pleasant to be left behind. But when there is the worldly advancement of one's husband or one's children to be considered, then it becomes a different matter. Unworldly as we may think ourselves, we cannot altogether be proof against such considerations. The social treadmill becomes more and more a duty, and acquaintances must be kept up. For from the cold outer circle of acquaintances, year by year, individuals constantly press nearer into the inner circle of friends; and how are we to know these at first sight? And then, in some professions wives can materially help their husbands by a due regard to calling; for instance, a doctor's wife or a clergyman's can do a great deal in this way.

People with liveliness and social gifts can sometimes extract a good deal of amusement from these visits; but the love of calling is not indigenous in every human breast, for I myself well remember, as a small child, how I used to pity grown-up folk for having to "make calls"—almost as much as I pitied them for being apparently condemned to read the paper every morning at breakfast—and wondering, vaguely, if I should ever have to do the same.

Every woman with social ambitions has one great aim: namely, to appear very "chic." The most fatal obstacle to their "chicness" is not to know little points of etiquette; and yet, curiously enough, these are just the things you can get nobody to tell you. They are not told: they are observed: they are the "shibboleth" of the *parvenu*. The "Etiquette Book" makes it all seem a very simple matter. Here are a few of the instructions it gives:—

(1) Cleanliness must be observed in calling. The hands should receive special attention.

(2) Hold your handkerchief freely in the hand, and do not roll it into a ball.

(3) Never appear in a drawing-room with mud on your boots.

These appear to be but rudiments in the art; they are unnecessary for us, so we would like to go farther, but farther than this the "Etiquette Book" does not take us. After all, we may console ourselves that the best substitutes for "etiquette" are tact, sympathy, intuition. Intuition will teach us that ten minutes are sufficient for a first call; tact that we are not to outstay a later arrival; sympathy that we are not to monopolise the conversation of our hostess. As to how many cards to leave, or how many corners of the said cards to turn down or up—this does not so greatly matter. I am ashamed to confess that, after years of calling, I do not yet fully understand the significance of the turned-up corners. And in bygone days I have favoured certain fortunate acquaintances with whole sheaves of unnecessary pasteboard. *Apropos* of leaving cards, I remember a story of two girls who were sent by their mother to make a round of calls. They took with them a batch of their own cards and those of the people they were going to visit, for the sake of their addresses. Unfortunately, the cards got mixed up, with terrible results to the callers, and even worse complications to the called-on, not to be subsequently unravelled even by an army of etiquette books.

No less important than the art of calling is the art of being called upon. That this is not always well understood, even in circles presumably cultivated, the following experiences may serve to show.

One afternoon in March I armed myself for the battle. I owed terrible arrears of calls, and hoped to get a great number cleared off. The day was well chosen; it was a Monday, and most people go out on Mondays. I seized my card-case and sallied forth. Some of the calls had been owing three, some six, months; but we are not so strict as we used to be, and in London we are less strict than in the provinces, so that my mind only misgave me slightly. Nor did I, although I am distinctly shy, trouble myself about the people I was going to visit. In the days of my youth I remembered to have heard ladies "tick off" on their fingers the subjects of which they would talk at a call. When these subjects (and the fingers) were exhausted, they knew it was time to take their leave. But I was not going to concern myself with such things. I knew that nowadays the less trouble one takes, and the greater the gaps one leaves in the conversation, the more one is thought of.

The first house I arrived at happened to be Mrs. X——'s, in the debatable region between Bayswater and St. John's Wood. It was a stuccoed villa, with a small cat-ridden front garden, decorated with some tombstones—or were they vases?—by way of gates. I was ushered into a fireless drawing-room. A cold east wind whistled in all the chinks, and I drew my furs closer about me. I thought I faintly distinguished the rattle of plates in the distance. Horror! was that lunch being discussed? I looked nervously at my watch; it was just three. I had been obliged to begin my round early. After an interval of five minutes, during which I "took in" all the details of the room—terra-cotta Cupids on plush brackets, be-ribboned hand-screens, photographs of curates and of babies—a maid came in, lit the fire, and retired. If anything makes one feel more particularly unwished-for, it is this cold-blooded lighting of the fire after one's arrival. I waited another quarter of an hour, during which the said fire smoked horribly. Just as the smoke reached a climax, and I was wondering whether I should not fling open the windows and sound an alarm, Mrs. X—— entered. She had evidently changed her gown and adorned herself, regardless of time. As soon as she could see me through the cloud of smoke, she was apologetic and effusive. The fire was rectified, but I soon took my leave, for the twenty minutes' lonely wait had sadly taken up the time. For this reason, also, I was rather relieved when, at the next three houses on my list, the people were all "out." At the last of these—a spacious abode on Campden Hill—in answer to my knock, a servant came out, and looked up at me from the area before answering the door. I have often wondered at this proceeding; it seems harmless enough, and yet for some unknown reason it always irritates me beyond measure, and I defend myself with my umbrella from inspection. From the hesitating way this damsel said "Out," I was convinced that the family were upstairs, having a comfortable afternoon with the dressmaker.

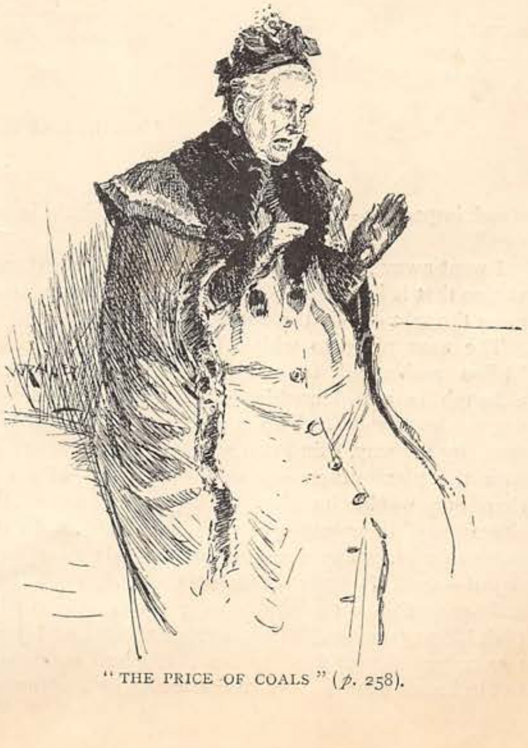
At my next call my experiences were slightly similar. It was in Mayfair. A pompous butler opened the door with that brick-wall kind of expression that "well-bred" servants so greatly affect.

"Is Mrs. M—— in?" I inquired humbly.

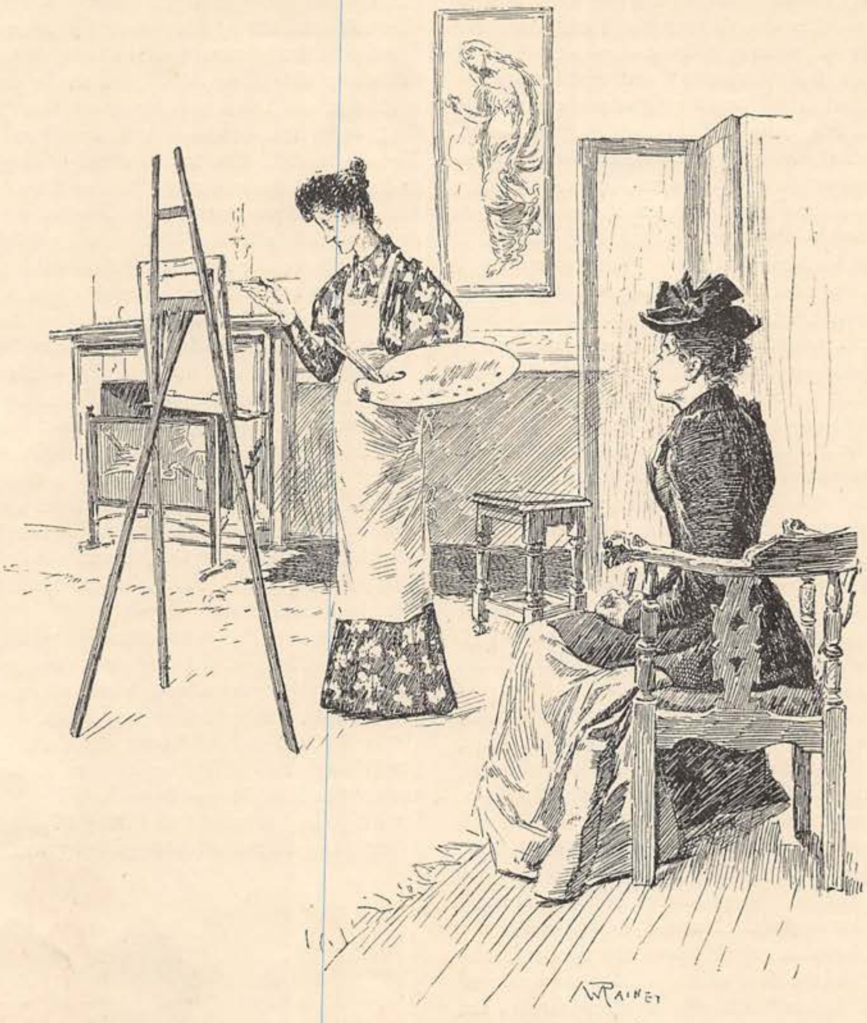
"I'll see, 'm." Then, calling to a passing housemaid: "Is Mrs. M—— in to-day?"

"I'll go and ask her," said the girl.

Returning in five minutes—during which the butler



"THE PRICE OF COALS" (*p.* 258).



"SHE HARDLY TOOK ANY NOTICE OF ME."

stood impassive—"Mrs. M——· says she isn't in to-day."

I went away feeling small, and with an inward conviction that if I had had a carriage I should have been more thought of—by the butler, at least.

The next place to which I bent my steps was a "bijou residence" in one of those streets which, although in a fashionable neighbourhood, somehow suggest back mews. Here a pleasant maid smiled at me. By the way, I find that servants have more to do with the pleasantness—or unpleasantness—of a call than one would imagine. They often reflect the character of their employer quite as much as do the surroundings. The surroundings in this case were unjust—dyed Pampas grass in the hall, stuck into gaily-enamelled drain-pipes, and pictures draped with pink Liberty scarves. The drawing-room, also "bijou," was crammed with furniture, so that I had much ado not to knock over two or three tables as I advanced to greet the smiling hostess. An undue partiality for Pampas grass and knick-knacks is not a crime, and I could have been very happy here if there had not been present another visitor—an elderly lady with a voluminous black brocaded cloak, who for ten minutes held forth on the subject of the price of coals.

I extricated myself carefully from the mazy windings of the furniture, and then made my way to a pre-Raphaelite household, where long-necked and anæmic females glared at me from every corner, and the rooms were of an extreme—nay, classic—bareness. Here the lady of the house, Miss Y——, was busy painting, and she hardly took any notice of me. These "easy manners" are, I believe, considered entirely "chic" in some circles; but as it was my first call, and I felt shy, I was not long in taking my leave.

My next experience was at Mrs. Z——'s, a clever, busy woman, much occupied by political meetings and committees. She happened, just as I was ushered in, to be herself escorting some friends to the door, and she is very short-sighted.

"Did you want anything?" she said kindly, coming up to me. "A hospital ticket, perhaps?"

I fled incontinently.

Twilight was coming on. I began to feel weary, and it occurred to me that a cup of tea would not be inappropriate. With this end in view, I bethought myself of some fashionable relatives of mine who lived close by. I arrived, as I thought, at their house in Eaton Square (but I was not quite certain about the number) and was ushered upstairs. To my horror, who should advance towards me but an old couple whom I had never in my life seen before! The ground reeled under me. Was I in a dream? But they seemed to think they knew me.

"We have not met since that delightful bazaar, Miss C——," the old lady said.

"And how well you acted your part in the farce!" cried the old gentleman.

Whom in the name of wonder did they take me for? At first I thought I would explain, and then—no, I would carry it through. They were most kind and hospitable, but—how in the world I got through that bad five minutes I shall never know.

It was raining when I got outside, and again tea occurred to me. I found my cousin's house at last. It took at least three powdered footmen to escort me up the marble stairs, and when I had got there I wished myself heartily anywhere else. Several people were present, all presumably in the same "set." They talked and laughed vociferously, and my hostess, after greeting me, paid me no more attention. After I had discussed the rival climates of Folkestone and Dover with a neglected old lady very earnestly for five minutes, all the party rose.

"I am so sorry," said my cousin, coming up to me, "that you won't have any tea. What a pity you have to go so soon! Only just a glimpse, wasn't it? The carriage is at the door. What! we can't drop you anywhere? Well, good-bye."

I came away tea-less and misanthropical. It rained still harder, and I suddenly remembered Mary N——, who lived in one of the sad little streets near by. Hers was no "bijou residence," but a poor little ordinary abode, of the kind usually let as "genteel apartments," which have such a plaintive air of having "known better days." Yet the house told of Mary's charm. The ugly door was painted white; there were flowers—early as it was in the year—in the window-boxes, and Mary's nice little maid stood smiling in the doorway to welcome me. Mary herself could not come to meet me. She was still young, but year by year she lay uncomplainingly in her pretty room, not able to move, nearly always suffering, and yet always bright and happy. Her face glowed when she saw me—she was always delighted to see a friend—and she flung away the books and papers which surrounded her.

"Mary," I said solemnly, "I've come to protest."

"Against what?" said Mary, smiling.

"Against making calls. It's a pure waste of time."

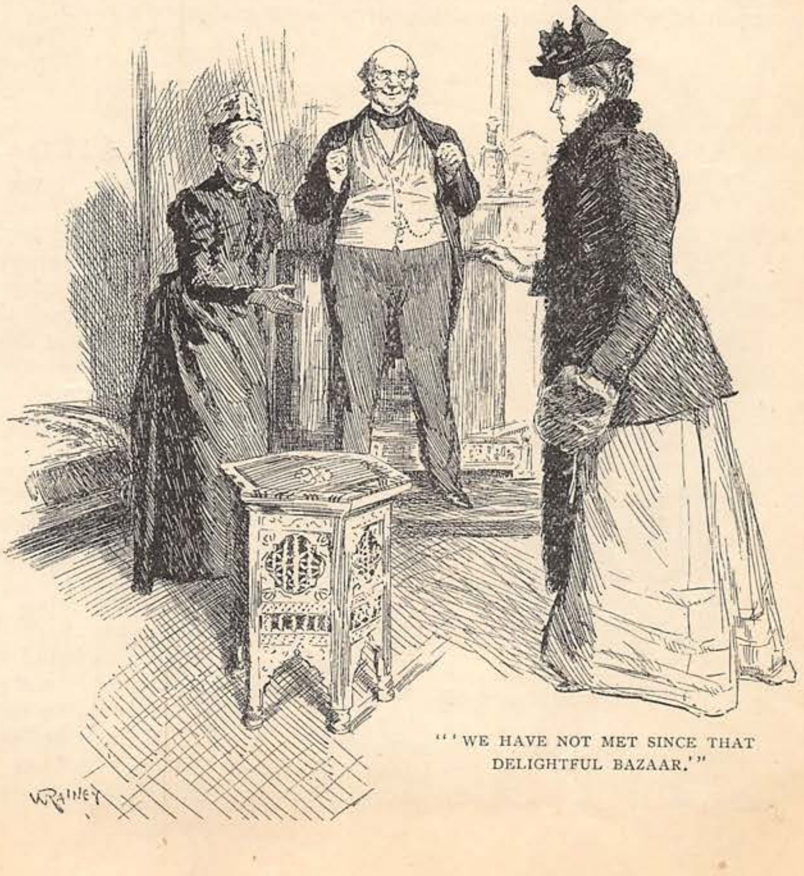
"I don't know," Mary said. "It seems to me I should get on very badly if no one called on *me*."

"You're different," I said; and then I proceeded to tell her of my afternoon's experiences.

"Well, I must own that to-day you've been particularly unfortunate. It doesn't always happen so."

"It very seldom happens that a call is really congenial," I grumbled. "I never come away feeling any the better for my visits. Oh, I know what you mean." Here I caught sight of a gleam of fun on Mary's face. "You think that is not the primary object of calling; you think that it is probably I who am unsympathetic——"

"Not unsympathetic to *me*," Mary interrupted sweetly; "but I think you *do* expect too much from people. One should be content with what they have to give. One can't expect," she added thoughtfully,



"'WE HAVE NOT MET SINCE THAT DELIGHTFUL BAZAAR.'"

"that everybody should be made on the same pattern. And even if one doesn't like it, it is good for one to make visits; otherwise, one loses 'the sweet habit of kindness.'"

"Yes, there's something in that," I cried eagerly. "Sometimes, when I've had a bad cold and haven't paid calls for a few weeks, I feel myself getting quite crusted, and I shrink from going out more than ever."

"I know: I have felt it too," Mary replied thoughtfully, "after one of my bad turns. Unsociability grows on what it feeds, and we mustn't encourage it. And, do you know, sometimes I've felt that the most tiresome people—people I've really felt to be quite bores at the time—have given me a kind of mental fillip, and brought me out of myself and my grievances."

"I wonder," I said thoughtfully, "why calls don't make *me* feel so? Perhaps you're right—I don't set about it in the right spirit. But one gets *so* tired of calls—calls when people don't want to see you—calls when you only hope they won't be at home—calls when it's a question of one's husband's interest—calls when the boys are home from school—calls when it's 'the children's hour'——"

"*I* should like 'the children's hour,'" put in Mary tenderly.

"Well," I said, beginning to regain my self-respect, "London isn't so bad as the provinces or the colonies as regards calling. There it amounts almost to a curse. A cousin of mine is married to a barrister out there, and—only imagine!—a very vulgar woman complained to her husband—a rich, powerful solicitor—that my cousin had 'cut her dead' in the street. The husband actually wrote and threatened to withdraw his patronage unless the matter were satisfactorily explained. And my poor cousin is as short-sighted as a bat, and never saw the dreadful woman at all. Such things couldn't happen in England."

Mary smiled.

"No," she said; "we are often rude and ill-bred, but that is a depth we don't sink to."

"Well, things are quite bad enough here. Days at home," I went on, "are my greatest bugbears. People living in the suburbs declare themselves 'at home' on one particular day in the week. Sometimes they have the assurance to announce themselves as only at home 'the fifth Monday in the month'; and how *can* you be expected to remember that? If you *don't* go on their 'day,' it's not considered polite; and if you *do*, you simply don't see them at all—only a number of their friends; and people *never* like each other's friends."

"It's very hard on you," Mary replied smilingly; "and really I begin to think that I am a lucky person. I am never called upon to endure these woes, and I can yet have nice friends who come to see *me*."

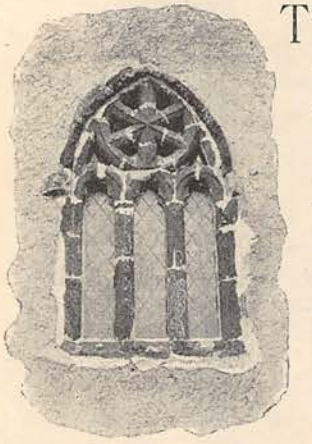
I felt a pang of inward shame.

"Mary," I said, "I'm a brute. I won't say any more."

And here tea came in, and we had the cosiest happiest time together—the tea served in the prettiest little Oriental cups, with the kettle simmering on the hob, and the Persian cat purring at Mary's feet. I felt as if I had left the cruel world outside for a peaceful haven.

A TRIP TO ST. KILDA.

A PRIZE PAPER BY THE REV. R. C. MACLEOD. WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.



EAST WINDOW, RODEL.

THERE was a saintly man once, a hard-working parson, who, in the presence of his bishop, was deploring the wickedness of his clerical neighbours who one and all took an annual holiday. "Now I," he went on, "have not slept out of my own parish for fifteen years."

He waited for an episcopal benediction. It came, but not quite in the form expected.

"Oh, your poor parishioners!" said the bishop with exquisite humour.

I am not a saintly man, but I have a fond and tender regard for the welfare of my poor parishioners; and so it comes to pass that I religiously go away for a few weeks every year.

My 1893 holiday was fairly begun when the scene opens. The good ship *Flowerdale* was coming slowly into the quay at Dunvegan, in the Island of Skye, one lovely June evening. I, the parson, was standing, camera in hand, taking a shot at a group on the shore; my brother, the captain, was leaning over the bows meditating.

"Are you coming?" reaches us across the water in three girlish voices.

"Yes," goes back in two stentorian basses.

The owners of the three voices make signs of great joy.

We, the parson and the captain, had been somewhat taken aback when we went on board the *Flowerdale* at six in the morning, by reading the contents of a note from one of our nieces at Dunvegan, which was handed to us by the captain.

She suggested that we should get up at five the following morning, and start for Harris in order to join the *Dunara Castle*, and go in her to St. Kilda.