



BY ELIZABETH L. BANKS, AUTHOR OF "CAMPAIGNS OF CURIOSITY," ETC.



ANY English people seem to be under the impression that the Americans know little of the comforts of home life, and those of our cousins who have visited us go away with the idea that, as a nation, we are most uncomfortably situated indoors. Why this should be so, it is difficult for Americans to understand, for they themselves are firmly convinced that they have solved the problem of how to make home happy.

"You don't have homes in America; you have flats and boarding-houses," said a well-known author to me recently, after a return from a fortnight's visit to the United States. Now, flat-life is not more common in America than in England, while the number of boarding-houses, taking the difference in population into consideration, is less there than here.

The typical New York house is not so large nor so high as the usual run of London houses. Although the hotels and business-buildings are well worthy of the name "skyscrapers," which has been very aptly given to them on this side of the water, the private residences do not aspire to so lofty an eminence. The usual height is three or four storeys, the floor above the basement being called the first, instead of the ground floor, as in London. The high stone steps take the first floor far above the pavement, leaving the basement on a level with the ground, an advantage which the servants who live in the

dark and dismal London basements would greatly appreciate. The basement usually contains the kitchen, pantry and store-cupboards, and the dining-room. The scullery, that catch-all of the London residences, is not known. In the larger houses, a part of the cellar, which corresponds to the English basement, is fitted up as a laundry, with every modern convenience. In this room the floor is boarded smoothly over, and one side of the wall is entirely taken up with stationary tubs, each of which has hot and cold-water faucets and waste-pipe, so that no carrying or emptying of water is necessary in the process of washing. In another part of the room are to be found the patent ironing-boards, which, when not in use, may be folded up and put away. A large range with attachments for boiling clothes and heating flat-irons is also a part of the laundry outfit. Every house has what is known as a "back-yard," in which the clothes are dried. In the smaller establishments the laundries are sometimes dispensed with, and the kitchen is fitted up with stationary tubs. The furnace, by which the house is heated throughout, is built either in the cellar or the basement.

In houses where the front room of the basement is used only as a breakfast-room, the dining-room is on the first floor, and is connected with the kitchen by a lift—or, as Americans call it, a "dumb waiter." The servant attending the table has none of the carrying or running up and downstairs, which makes the duties of a London parlourmaid or man-servant so arduous.

The New York drawing-room which is usually on the first floor, has more comfort and less elegance than the drawing-room of a London residence. More money is expended in the furnishing of an English drawing-room than it would take to fit up a whole house for one of our well-to-do New York families. Except among the very wealthy Londoners, who have no need to economise in any direction, the idea seems to be to ornament the drawing-room somewhat at the expense of the rest of the house. Gilded mirrors, costly paintings, expensive *bric-à-brac*, and inlaid furniture of every description, are quite the rule in the drawing-rooms of the English middle-classes; while in America only our millionaires indulge in these things. Tables, cabinets, and chairs, inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, are beyond the means of an ordinary New York business man. But he has a weakness for easy-chairs, and soft, springy couches; so the drawing-room furniture is picked out with a view more to comfort than elegance. Couches are much in evidence in an American home. No room is considered well furnished without them.

The second and third floors of a New York house are utilised for sleeping-rooms, which are in many respects the most comfortable and beautiful part of the house. The English idea of a bedroom is a place to sleep in and leave the next morning as soon as possible; and probably for that reason little or no pains are taken to beautify it. In America, the furnishing of the bedroom is a matter of the first importance. Handsome draperies, pictures, plants, folding-beds, mantel glasses and cheval glasses, and the easiest of chairs, turn it into a boudoir, where the lady of the house spends much of her time, unless she has a private sitting-room adjoining. American women have the reputation of living in their bedrooms, which is to a certain extent true, because they have a predilection for loose gowns and rocking-chairs when they are indoors; and to be always dressed and sitting in the drawing-room ready to receive visitors, like their English cousins, would be to them a sort of unbearable martyrdom. That this way of living is not good for their backs or their nerves, even they themselves are quite willing to admit; and it is said that certain physicians in New York, Boston, and Chicago are meditating an attempt to abolish the rocking-chair from American homes.

The typical London bedroom has none of these temptations to its occupants. Indeed, it is positively ugly, and has so many inconveniences and discomforts as to make it a pity that a happy medium could not be struck

between the English and American style. I have noticed that although gas-pipes are laid in most of the rooms, quite frequently no fittings are attached, and one is obliged to use candles. The dressing-table, which is usually placed directly in the window, may, perhaps, succeed in bringing the rays of light to a correct focus about the mirror, but certainly the back of the dressing-table cannot be considered an ornament to the front windows of the house. Yet the dressing-table is in itself a pretty piece of furniture if it could only be placed in a position where it would not disfigure the front of the house.

It would be impossible to make a comparison of English and American homes without taking up the subject of domestic service. In England, the opinion is quite general that this problem is a much more serious one in America than in England.

"Oh, the poor American women, with their help that is no help!" sighed Mr. Kipling when first he went to the United States, and that sigh has been echoed and re-echoed all over Great Britain. A few weeks ago I was present at a gathering where the subject of domestic service in the two countries was being discussed. A lady, who had just returned from America, gave it as her opinion that English housewives had little of which to complain in this regard, when their troubles were compared with those of the American women, large numbers of whom were losing their wits every year and rapidly filling up the insane asylums, all on account of the servant problem.

"Why," said she, "when I was in one of the Western States, I ordered a fish cooked, and the waiter brought it to me with the scales on!"

Then a melancholy, pitiful "Oh!" resounded through the room, and my countrywomen became at once melancholy subjects for compassion and commiseration. Now, the lady who had the fish served whole and scaly, neglected to mention the fact that it had been cooked by a newly-arrived emigrant from Erin's Isle before her American mistress had got an opportunity to train her. It is true that the American housekeeper who gets her servants direct from Castle Garden, must exercise even more than Job-like patience before she can transform them into anything like civilised help. But let an English mistress take a girl from the East-end slums and put her to cooking or waiting at table. She will also find much difficulty in training her in the way she should go.

Castle Garden, in New York, is a sort of

domestic-service bureau, where the American housewife who has much time and patience, but little money, at her disposal may pick out from the "raw material" such a subject, or subjects, as she thinks most likely to benefit by her training. She takes the emigrant, who during the first few months of her residence in New York is known as a "greenhorn," and teaches her not only how to work but very often to talk and understand English, or, more properly speaking, "American." While she is thus being instructed, the girl receives only her board and "pocket wages," which amount to a few dollars per month, and are so many dollars more than she earns. At the end of a few months or a year, according to her natural cleverness, she learns to do housework after the American methods, when her wages are increased. Such help is employed in families who, if they resided in England, would keep a "general;" but well-to-do American families do not bother with "greenhorns," preferring rather to take girls who have already been "broken in."

In an ordinary-sized house, such as I have described, the work is usually done by two servants—the cook and the chambermaid. In London, the same sort of house would require four or six servants to keep it in order; but I would attribute this fact not so much to the inefficiency of the London servants as to the lack of conveniences for doing the work. Many London residences seem to have been built with an idea of making the housework as difficult of performance as possible; while the American house is supplied with every modern improvement and labour-saving appliance. Not only is all the housework done by the cook and chambermaid, but they have also to do the washing and ironing of the family as well as for themselves. The term "wash-money" is unknown, as is also its companion, "beer-money." The matter of the washing and ironing of clothes is not a difficult one. It is the cook's duty to attend to the washing every Monday morning, on which day she rises as early as four or five o'clock. The chambermaid prepares the breakfast and clears it away. If the cook is a good worker, the clothes will be hanging on the line at ten o'clock; by eleven, the kitchen or laundry will be scrubbed, and at one o'clock the clothes are sprinkled and folded ready for ironing Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning.

The work of the house is about evenly divided between the two servants. As all the halls and rooms are heated (to the boiling-point, my English readers will say) by means of registers, the chambermaid has no hearth-

cleaning and lighting of fires, which is a part of the hardest work required of the London housemaid. Then as the bedrooms are supplied with hot and cold running water, there is no carrying of heavy water-cans up and downstairs; and there are no candlesticks to scrape off and fill. It will readily be seen that to be one of two servants in a New York house is really not so difficult a position as to be one of five or six in a London house.

"Who cleans the knives, and who brushes the boots?" I wonder what London woman has not been confronted with this question when engaging new servants. In a London household where but two or three servants are kept, these two things are a frequent cause for contention below stairs. The cook declares it is not "her place," while the housemaid or parlourmaid insists with equal firmness that she did not engage to do that kind of work. The New York cook scours the steel knives as she washes them. It will perhaps take her a fraction of a minute to clean six, while in London knife-scouring is made a really solemn occasion. Very often when the dishes are washed, the knives are laid aside in the scullery, there to wait until someone "gets time"—and inclination—to attend to them.

"Where are the knives?" I asked one day of the parlourmaid, as I sat down to luncheon to find nothing but fish-knives with which to cut the chops.

"The cook is out and they are not cleaned," she answered in a placidly indifferent manner.

I had not then been long in London, and did not appreciate the fine lines of distinction that were drawn in the kitchen, so I requested her to clean them and bring them at once.

"It's not my place, miss," was the reply I received.

While I vainly endeavoured to cut my chop with a fish-knife, I decided that many of those "poor, worn-out American women," who are said to have died of nervous prostration because of the "help that is no help," must have kept house in London with two servants.

The afternoon dress of the American servants is not nearly so pretty or becoming as that worn in England. The bibbed apron of the London housemaid, with embroidered epaulets, the Eton collar and the cuffs tied with ribbons, to say nothing of the jaunty cap with streamers, is a costume that I particularly admire, and one that I was only too willing to don when I essayed to play the rôle of a housemaid. In New York, the servants wear caps, usually of the French pattern, but their cuffs and collars are such as are worn on the inside, not the outside of the dress; while the white

apron, without a bib, is nearly as large and long as the black skirt, which it almost covers. They take a particular pride in the tying of the apron-strings, and the larger the bow the smarter the servant. It is possible that this reference to the "badges" worn by the American servant girl may be something of a revelation to certain English servants who have been contemplating a trip to America, where they have taken it for granted—as one of them not long ago said to me—that "servants are treated like ladies." The truth is that there is no more equality or even friendliness between the American mistress and her maid than exists in England. Apart from the fact that the American houses are more conveniently built for domestic work, the conditions of service are about the same.

As regards food, the American servants are usually supplied with the same as that eaten by the family. For breakfast they have something more substantial than bread-and-butter and tea, yet they eat but three meals a day, whereas in London five or six meals are given. They know nothing of "levenses," as the eleven-o'clock luncheon of bread and cheese and beer is called, and they do not indulge in five-o'clock tea.

In using the term "American servants," I have, of course, not used it in its strictest

sense, for, with the exception of the Western farmer's daughter who sometimes elects to "go out" as a "hired girl" to her neighbour in order to earn pocket money, there are no American servants, and our servants must of necessity come from among the negroes and the foreigners. The best class of white servants are the Swedes and Norwegians, who are quick to learn both the language and the customs of the country. The most troublesome servants are the Irish girls. They are not so numerous as formerly, the large numbers of Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans making it difficult for them to secure situations. The most faithful and competent service that Americans receive is from the negro women, who are natural workers and natural cooks.

Taking it all in all, the servant problem in America is not so difficult of solution as many imagine, and my own sympathies are more with the English than the American mistress. It is quite possible that within a few years we shall be able to do without servants altogether, for I understand that Mr. Edison is giving his attention to the invention of something in the shape of an "automatic houseworker," which by the simple turning of a crank may be so adjusted as to perform all branches of domestic labour.



MR. ADOLF.

BY A. E. ORPEN, AUTHOR OF "THE CHRONICLES OF THE SID," "A MODERN MARTYR," ETC.

III.



It was Christmas week, and the prairie was covered with a thin coating of snow. Never beautiful at any time, the prairie looked dreary enough when half-covered with snow; for the black patches of burnt grass showing through the snow gave a most desolate appearance to it. However, if a bright sun is shining overhead, things are not quite so bad. It was very cold, and not a creature was to be seen on the measureless plain. Such cattle as had to stay out had wisely sought the shelter of the "bottoms,"

where the brushwood around the creeks afforded both food and warmth.

People stayed indoors. Ann and her father and Amanda were sitting in their comfortable kitchen. He was reading aloud in some scientific paper scraps of news likely to interest his daughter. By-and-by he stopped and laid down his paper.

"When did you hear from Mr. Adolf last?" he said.

"Three weeks ago," replied Ann.

"Say anything now as to what he is going to do?"

"No; he said he was very busy, and had a great deal of writing. I think I read the letter to you. I'll get it, if you like."

"No, no; I remember, of course," said her father; and he sighed slightly, and picked up his paper again. He was sometimes a little puzzled about Mr. Adolf. He half-wished that he had never come across them in his wanderings after the picturesque. Ann had