

OUR BELONGINGS: THE MOTHERS.



THE opinions concerning "mothers" are, perhaps, more varied than those about any other member of the human family. A little while ago we were told that in the whole realm of fiction no "mother" has played an important part—no good, loving, praiseworthy mother, that is—for the wicked ones, the hard-hearted, match-making,

daughter-driving mater lends herself admirably to fiction, doing frequent duty as the shadow in the picture.

When we think, however, of the happy homes, the sweet girls, the manly sons, the wise fathers, it seems impossible to believe that she who trains the children and is companion to their father should be so inferior to them all in worth and wisdom. Reflection leads us to the belief that the happiest mothers, like nations, are those who have no history.

An admirable race we hold them—much-enduring, tactful, loving, unselfish, with busy lives, and often aching hearts, but happy because sure of the niche in life that belongs to them.

In most households mother has to act as deputy between the children and the father. That matter of the latch-key, for instance, when Reginald feels his years and his steadiness entitle him to enter his home at what hour suits him without being "sat up" for; and pater says no son shall hold a key of his mansion. Mater brings to bear the arguments that tell best, and the little "Chubb" is forthcoming. The girls' allowances, too, what a vexed question it is; when Mother suggested that less than the sum Father volunteered to supply would do if he would add expensive evening dresses and riding habits on occasion. Then about Charley's education: pater felt sure that four years at the High School would fit him well for business. How neatly Mother explained the absolute necessity of a good public school, with the university to follow, for

a boy of such undoubted talent as Charley! Jenny's singing lessons, Clare's violin, Will's trip to Paris—who can say how much diplomatic talent has been brought to bear on each and all? Then, again, that quiet evening hour which Father needs, the strong feeling he holds about early rising, punctuality, quietness of manner, and respectfulness of speech—how could the importance of these things be understood by the flock unless Mother explained them from Father's standpoint?

In the servants' department, again, she has to make cook understand that there are certain crimes for which no quarter will be given. She insists that the coffee shall be always perfectly made, the water invariably boiling, the eggs done to a turn, and that meals shall be served daily exactly at the hour ordered; while pater has to be taught that cook's weekly "evening out" is a thing sacred, that the large blue bow or the bright red feather she wears is not to be noticed. Mater manages not even to see it, but that cannot be expected of pater.



A MOTHER WHO MANAGES.

Mother can do so much; she has almost a despotic power over the minds and bodies of her belongings, and it is of such vital importance that she should wield it aright; but who does not know the house in which the mother is a nonentity? It makes no difference apparently whether or not she takes the head of the table. She has her

place, and takes emphatically a back seat. Sometimes her brain is too busy and her mind too active to permit her to let the young people follow each his own bent. She must push this one, alter the determination of the other, and repress the longings of a third, till the bewildered boys and girls do not know what to do with their lives.

Some mothers let their children share all their hopes and fears, anxieties and cares, while others make them stand away in the sunshine while they endeavour to keep the smallest shadow from touching the young lives. One mother will let her daughter leave her for a home of her own, having no notion of the duties of housekeeping, no idea but that the legs of mutton and sirloins of beef will arrive of themselves as does the postman. Another will immerse her girls in housekeeping details almost before they leave the schoolroom, so that at any moment Mary or Jessie can take up the order-books and go with assured steps to the morning interview with cook.

There are mothers who love society, who treat matters of dress and appearance as things of first importance, whose engagement-books are full, and whose card-cases are trotted out every afternoon, and before whom the social duties loom so large that all others are buried in their shade. Others care nothing for the world outside; the sons and daughters may ask and talk, but it re-

quires persuasion that has almost to become threats before the rest of the household can get permission to "invite a few friends." There are mothers who sacrifice everything of self, individuality, time, pleasure, to make their children "happy," and who only end by making them selfish.

There are mothers who expect their children to sacrifice everything to them, to have no thoughts apart, no wish fulfilled, till "mother's" comfort and pleasure are considered. This treatment may make children



A LITERARY MOTHER.

own occupations; sometimes, perhaps, they are quite outside her home. She may be an artist, a speaker, writer, or teacher, but her life is arranged without reference to her family, and they have learned to do without her. A maiden aunt, the eldest daughter, a faithful servant—somebody is forthcoming to stop the gap and take her rightful place.

In some sad cases we have noticed the children with more will-power, more capacity for work, and more *savoir faire* than Mother, and she is shouldered and elbowed from her

unselfish, but of a surety it causes their lives to lack brightness.

There are mothers who look so much older than their age, such dear dowdies, with gloves that are always unbuttoned, straggly hair, and ill-made dresses. Inquiring strangers ask if Mary or James be not their grandchild instead of son or daughter. Others are so youthful in appearance that their eldest daughter is taken for a sister, and acquaintances exclaim "Impossible!" when introduced to a grandchild.

There are mothers to whom their house and its appointments are more important subjects for thought than the well-being of husband or child. Mothers there are who care altogether for the children, to the neglect of everything else; mothers, also, to whom the husband is all in all, and everyone else not placed; mothers who are trusted and loved, mothers who are persons apart; mothers who have no sense of humour—surely a chapter might well be devoted to these!—mothers who are always asking advice, mothers who are for ever giving it; and mothers there are who are faithful, just, and true, doing their best for the comfort and guidance of those around, with an earnest longing that every act and thought may help to a higher life those dear to them, who are pleasant, kindly, genial, loving, and who try to live up to their own ideal. These, though not useful as heroines for fiction, should be



A DAUGHTER-DRIVING MOTHER.

held, we think, to have a place amongst the world's good furniture.

M. R. L.



A CAST SHOE.

BY EDITH E. CUTHELL, AUTHOR OF "ONLY A GUARD-ROOM DOG," "LADY LORRIMER'S SCHEME," ETC. ETC. ETC.



EVERYONE knows how lucky it is to find a horse-shoe; but not everyone knows how lucky it is to lose one. In fact, an ancient nursery rhyme telling of much woe arising from the loss of a horse-shoe nail comes into my mind at this moment. The following story, however, goes to prove the contrary.

"Of course you know what you are doing, Oonah?"

My uncle spoke kindly to me, as he always did, and glanced up at me from his newspaper with such a look of my dear father in his eyes that without more ado I threw myself on my

knees beside his chair and burst into tears. He began vainly endeavouring to comfort me, calling me his dear little Oonie, when—my aunt entered. Her appearance consoled me effectually. I never cared to cry before my aunt, and recovering myself with all possible speed, left the room.

Of course I knew what I was doing. I had not made up my mind to accept Lady Barbara's invitation without much consideration, and let me add, in the solitude of my own room, some tears. I knew that fatal note by heart. It ran:

"BRACEBY HALL,

"GRASSHIRE.

"Telegrams and parcels, Snaffleborough.

"DEAR MISS KILRENE.—My brother and I shall be very delighted if you will come and stay a week with us on the 3rd. I fear this is a dull time in the country,