

"Yes, dear, I know you will! I know you will!" he said, answering the unspoken promise, and looking down at her with one of his sweet, kindly smiles. "It will be a comfort to my wife as well as myself. She is very nervous about you. She was upstairs three times in the night to satisfy herself that you were well after your fright, and is too tired herself to come downstairs this morning. She is always bright and cheery, but she is not very strong. You would be sorry to make her ill."

No answer, only another grip of the hand, and a sudden straightening of the lips as if they were pressed together to avoid an involuntary trembling. There is something especially touching in the sight of restrained emotion, and as the Vicar thought of his own two daughters, his heart was very tender over the girl whose parents were

separated from her by six thousand miles of land and sea.

"Well, now, dear, I have said my say and that is an end of it. I don't like finding fault, but my dear wife has thrown that duty on my shoulders by being too tender-hearted to say a word of blame even when it is needed. Her method works very well, as a rule, but there are occasions when it would be criminal to withhold a just reprimand." The Vicar stopped short and a spasm of laughter crossed his face. Peggy's fingers had twitched within his own as he spoke those last two words, and her eyes had dilated with interest. He knew as well as if he had been told that she was gloating over the new expression, and mentally noting it for future use. Nothing, however, could have been sweeter or more natural than the manner in which she sidled against him, and murmured—

"Thank you so much. I am sorry! I will truly try," and he watched her out of the room with a smile of tender amusement.

"A nice child—a good child—feels deeply. I can rely upon her to do her best."

Robert was hanging about in the passage, ready, as usual, to fulfil his vows of support, and Peggy slid her hand through his arm and sauntered slowly with him towards the school-room. Like the two girls, he had been at no loss to understand the reason of the call to the study, and would fain have expressed his sympathy, but Peggy stopped him with uplifted finger.

"No, no—he was perfectly right. You must not blame him. I have been guilty of reprehensible carelessness, and merited a reprimand!"

(To be continued.)



SOCIAL INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF AN EAST END GIRL.

PART I.

AN EVENING AT A GIRLS' CLUB.

I FIRST made Belinda Ann's acquaintance at a social evening at a club in Bethnal Green to which I had been invited by the lady who had instituted it.

In my innocence and ignorance (for at that time I was unacquainted with the manners and customs of the East End) I took my little roll of music in my hand, thinking I should be expected to contribute to the evening's entertainment; but on arrival I found that this was not necessary, as the girls were quite capable of amusing themselves and us too.

On certain occasions a fixed programme was arranged and carried out by friends from the West End, but this happened to be an "off night," when the members did pretty much as they pleased, my hostess leaving them to their own devices entirely, and not interfering unless their spirits threatened to get too boisterous.

As she truly said: "You cannot expect the same manners and etiquette here that you find among Lady Clara Vere de Vere and her friends at their aristocratic club near Grosvenor Square, but my girls have a great sense of honour and chivalry, and a word from me is generally sufficient."

The club-room was at the back of a large, old-fashioned house which at one time, long ago, stood in its own extensive grounds in the midst of a peaceful, rural neighbourhood.

Now it was hemmed in on all sides by streets and houses teeming with life, and the only relic of its former grandeur left was a tiny piece of ground in front.

Still, a certain air of aristocratic calm hung about it, and after my recent long drive through the hot, crowded streets, I breathed a sigh of relief when the front door closed behind me and I found myself in the spacious entrance-hall.

I followed the neat maid-servant (herself an

East Ender born and bred) along this out into a little paved yard, which we crossed, and up a flight of break-neck stairs into the club-room.

It was a long, narrow apartment, with a low platform at one end, and the wooden walls were hung with gay-coloured bunting interspersed with various flags, a few pictures from Christmas numbers, and some framed texts.

Odd strips of carpet, matting and rugs, covered the floor and on these stood small tables laden with magazines, books and games, while little chairs stood here and there not in stiff rows but in conversational attitudes, so to speak.

A fixed bench ran all round the walls, a piano (rather the worse for wear inside and out) stood in one corner of the platform, and a few plants in pots disguised by crinkled paper completed the furniture.

Judging from the noise that greeted me when I entered, the lungs of Belinda Ann and her friends were in fairly good condition, and I felt distinctly alarmed as I advanced, for they all turned and stared at me with one consent, making frank and audible remarks on my personal appearance and dress.

The room was crowded with girls, tall and short, dark and fair, fat and thin, very few of whom were playing games or reading, but all of whom were chattering as fast as their tongues would let them.

I was relieved when the lady who had invited me stepped forward to shake hands and at once piloted me up the room (for she knew I wanted to learn all I could about my East End sisters) whispering as she went, "I'm going to introduce Belinda Ann to you. You'll find out all you want to know from her," and next minute I found myself deposited next a girl who surveyed me with a mixture of good-humoured contempt and watchful suspicion.

The first was due to my small size, the

second to a lurking conviction that I wanted to patronise, or as she afterwards expressed it, "Come the toff over her."

As soon as she found out I was far from wishing to do this, she became more friendly, and assured my hostess that she'd take care of the "lydy."

Belinda Ann was a head and shoulders taller than myself and broad in proportion, although she was only eighteen. She possessed a quantity of black hair which came down to her eyebrows in front in a thick, straight fringe and was beautifully bright and clean. Brown eyes looked fearlessly at you from under the fringe, and her whole manner was that of a girl who, ever since she could walk, had had to fight for herself and protect herself, and had done it too.

You couldn't imagine anyone taking a liberty with Belinda Ann, although she was hail-fellow-well-met with everyone.

She might be a little rough in her manners, and not always too refined in her speech, but Belinda Ann had a heart of gold, was as true as steel to her friends, and thoroughly enjoyed life, taking the sweet with the bitter, spending money royally when she had it, and cheerfully going without when times were bad.

This evening she was attired in a peacock-blue cashmere and plush dress, which had seen its best days, almost covered by a large apron; not so clean as it had once been, and surmounted by a limp black straw hat adorned with some dejected-looking black feathers without a vestige of curl about them, and various dirty white flowers which flopped aimlessly over the brim.

I noticed that her boots were strong and good, and that near her lay a thick, handsome shawl, and in time I learnt that these two items of dress rank next in importance to the famous feathers, and that every true East Ender insists on having them of the best quality, and pays a good price for them.

Belinda Ann, meanwhile, having exhausted

her interest in me, was turning to exchange "chaff" with her other neighbour, when, with an inward gasp, I plunged boldly into conversation.

"Do you come here every evening?" I asked.

"Depends!" was the abrupt answer, given in an off-hand, defiant sort of way which characterised her manner with strangers. "P'raps I do an' p'raps I don't!" and her look so plainly added, "What's it to you?" that I refrained from pursuing the subject.

"You all seem very lively," I hazarded next, with a look round.

"So you'd be to get a chance to do something beside work!" was the fierce reply.

This made a capital opening to the question I was longing to lead up to, namely, "What do you do all day?"

"Oh, I'm engaged in chemistry," was the proud reply, accompanied by a visible swelling of her whole person.

"Chemistry!" I ejaculated, rather awe-struck at finding her so clever.

"'Ere, don't you believe 'er!" struck in a fair, florid girl next her on the other side. "She's bluffin' yer! She only sticks the lybels on the bottles at the cord-liver oil factory over the way."

Whereupon Belinda Ann, with perfect good-humour, made a grab at the other's hat and a friendly little tussle ensued, accompanied by shrieks of laughter and a brisk interchange of chaff.

As soon as this interlude was over and they had once more settled down, I took up the thread of conversation again.

"And are all these girls engaged in sticking — I mean, in the chemistry?" I inquired.

"No," she retorted; "some's jam an' some's pickles, but the jams are a low lot!" and the air of inexpressible scorn with which she said it would not have disgraced a West End beauty alluding to another, "who is not in our set, my dear."

I began to think my hostess had made a mistake in assigning me to Belinda Ann, as the latter seemed more disposed to snub me than anything else, and I was rather relieved when the piano struck up and the girls began to dance.

There were no men present, but this did not at all interfere with their happiness, and I sat lost in amazement at their extraordinary agility and wonderful steps.

Belinda Ann (or as I heard her friends call her, Blinderann) was in no wise behind the others, and sprang hither and thither with the best.

My hostess sank into a seat beside me and murmured apologetically—

"I let them do this to work off a little of their exuberant spirits, for they would never sit still a whole evening, and would fight probably if they had no other outlet. Some nights, if there is any specially good concert or entertainment, I allow each girl to bring one male relative or friend, but oddly enough they don't often avail themselves of the permission. On an informal evening like this, when there are only girls, I don't think a little physical

exercise does them any harm, and it tires them out so that they will listen to anything I have to say to them afterwards. If I drew the rein too tight, they would all disperse to the four winds and I should never get hold of them again."

I agreed, and presently seeing a girl leaning up against the wall, I plucked up courage and asked her if she would care to have me as a partner.

She seemed slightly surprised, but consented graciously, and we took a few turns together.

I flattered myself I had got on fairly well, and felt so elated at my success that by-and-by I sought Belinda Ann, who was fanning herself vigorously with her hat, and requested the pleasure.



ENVY.

Her answer rather stunned me.

"No, thank'ee. I've been watchin' yer an' your style won't do fer me!"

Before I had time to reply she was off again, taking part in some very pretty figures in which narrow coloured ribbons were plaited and unplaited as the girls holding the ends moved hither and thither.

As soon as everyone was thoroughly tired and disposed to sit quiet for half an hour or so, a girl (a stranger from the West End like myself) was asked by the hostess to play something; and accordingly, thinking as I should have done, that they preferred lively tunes, sat down and began to rattle off some "catchy" popular airs.

She was unceremoniously stopped by Belinda Ann—

"'Ere, we don't want that rot!"

"Oh," mildly replied the unfortunate pianist, not quite knowing what to say; "I thought you liked variety?"

"No, we don't," retorted the other, misunderstanding her and thinking she meant the music hall close by; "the V'riety costs tuppence an' we can't 'ford it."

"Well, what would you like?" was the inquiry.

"Give us 'We are rout on the ocean syling,' or 'God be with you till we meet agyne,'" and this request being complied with, these favourite hymns were shouted out at the top of their voices, Belinda Ann's in particular being like a clarion.

After this a diversion was created by one of the "pickles" volunteering a recitation which she gave with a good deal of dramatic power; then another girl sang a little song, and Belinda Ann followed with a second, and so the evening wore away to its close; but I felt dissatisfied, for I seemed no nearer attaining my object than before.

Taking the opportunity, I forcibly detained Belinda Ann as she was drifting by, and diffidently observed—

"You've told me what you work at, but how do you amuse yourself?"

"Ow? There ain't much difficulty 'bout that!" she returned scornfully. "There's this sort o' thing, an' bank 'ollerdy's, an' weddings, an' funerals, an' launchin' ships, an'—"

"I wish you'd let me go with you to some of these!" I eagerly interrupted.

She looked dubiously at me for a minute, thinking I was joking, but seeing I was in earnest, remarked casually—

"Well, I don't mind ef I do, but it's a bit rough sometimes fer the likes o' you."

"Oh, I sha'n't mind," I joyfully replied. "When can I begin?"

"A friend o' mine's goin' to be married the dy after tomorrow," she said graciously. "I could get yer an invite, if yer liked."

"Do!" was my ecstatic response. "Where shall we meet?"

"'Ere," she returned. "Yer can't go wanderin' about these streets by yerself, an' it wouldn't do fer your grand friends to see me a-knockin' at your door!"

I was trying in vain to assure her that she was quite wrong,

when she suddenly rammed her hat viciously down on her head, slung her shawl round her like a woollen whirlwind, and with the brief remark, "G'night," was gone. I also soon afterwards took my leave, having first told my hostess about the proposed expedition.

She looked a little anxious, but her face cleared when she heard that Belinda Ann was coming with me.

"That's all right," she observed, with a sigh of relief. "She's to be trusted to see that you come to no harm; but don't leave her for a minute, and don't wear jewellery or carry much money."

I promised, and went home full of anticipation at the idea of the new world about to open before my delighted eyes.

(To be continued.)

In Matthew Arnold's published *Letters*, he gives a piece of excellent advice to a young lady who is a relation of his:

"If I were you, I should now take to some regular reading, if it were only an hour a day. It is the best thing in the world to have something of this sort as a point in the day, and far too few people know and use this secret. You would have your district still and all your business as usual, but you would have this hour in your day, in the midst of it all, and it would soon become of the greatest solace to you. Desultory reading is a mere anodyne; regular reading, well chosen, is restoring and edifying."

It would be a good thing if every girl would study Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, and follow the advice therein contained. It has been so often quoted that we hesitate again to transcribe it; but it cannot be read too frequently.

"Have you measured and mapped out this short life and its possibilities? Do you know if you read this that you cannot read that; that what you lose to-day you cannot gain to-morrow? Will you go and gossip with your housemaid or your stable boy when you may talk with queens and kings? Will you jostle with the common crowd for *entrée* here and audience there, when all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen and the mighty of every place and time?"

Time is precious and is fleeting fast. There would be less poring over fashion-plates, fewer pennies spent on miscellaneous collections of tawdry scraps of useless information garnished with comic anecdotes, if it were realised that each hour spent in aimless, silly reading is an hour lost, never to be regained.

This may seem "a counsel of perfection." We do not say, read nothing at all of the ephemeral literature whose aim is to enliven and amuse, but if you have any desire for self-culture, read something else as well. If you get into the habit of this light, disconnected, desultory reading, you will find it spoil your taste and your appetite for anything else. The loss you will suffer will be simply incalculable. Amuse a few spare minutes at the railway station, on the tedious journey, by all means; but do not let your reading stop short at mere entertainment or information about dress.

It is a terrible thing when this power of

reading—the instrument, almost the only instrument, of self-culture—is turned so persistently to other ends that it becomes a warped and worthless tool.

"It is of paramount importance," says Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, "to acquire the art *not* to read. . . . We should recollect that he who writes for fools finds an enormous audience, and we should devote the ever scant leisure of our circumscribed existence to the master spirits of all ages and nations—those who tower over humanity, and whom the voice of Fame proclaims; only such writers cultivate and instruct us."

Too stringent perhaps! and yet a truth lies here which may well be taken to heart. A more modern critic, Frederic Harrison, puts it thus:

"Every book that we take up without a purpose is an opportunity lost of taking up a book with a purpose; every bit of stray information which we cram into our heads without any sense of its importance is for the most part a bit of the most useful information driven out of our heads and choked off from our minds. . . . We know that books differ in value as much as diamonds differ from the sand on the seashore. . . . and I cannot but think the very infinity of opportunities is robbing us of the actual power of using them."

What to read, will form the subject of future articles; only let the girl who scans this page make up her mind that she will follow its advice and read *something*. "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability" is a familiar sentence of Lord Bacon. Even the busiest girl can lay this to heart and profit by it, as was shown by some articles which appeared in *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER* on the life of working girls—"My Daily Round." Some of the most charming sentences in those interesting papers were the sentences where appreciation of literature as a companion to the scant hour of freedom held a conspicuous place.

Life is often a very hard and sordid thing, and far too many women are forced to spend their days in detail of a distasteful kind. We must not extol a spirit of discontent with "the trivial round, the common task," and must remember the French motto, "When one cannot have what one likes, one must like what one has." Yet we all need a resource. Every man or woman, young or

old, ought to have a refuge wherein to flee from the worries and minute cares of "this troublesome world"—a refuge that shall prove

"The world's sweet inn from care and wearisome turmoil."

And for this self-culture is invaluable.

Walter Besant somewhere observes that he often sees in London omnibuses, girls returning from the work of the day, whose lips are noiselessly moving. Their look is harassed, and they are talking to themselves in irritated fashion of what has gone wrong; perhaps uttering imaginary repartees to unreasonable employers. Some engrossment in poetry or romance, some mental diversion which should force them to turn away their thoughts, would be a panacea, and they might dwell with consolation, remembering such employers, on one of the antitheta of Lord Bacon—"In reading we hold converse with the wise; in the business of life, generally with the foolish."

And study is a priceless relief and refuge to women in any grade of society. A girl who really loves reading possesses an inexhaustible charm to lift her above the little worries of daily life, in whatever sphere that life may be.

In Switzerland one finds a summer stay in the valleys, beautiful and fertile as they are, beset by certain annoyances, of which perhaps the most dire and disturbing is a peculiar sort of fly, like a horse-fly, that settles and stings even through a thick glove. The most lovely summer resorts beside the lakes are infested by this creature, which comes everywhere with slow, sleepy virulence, alighting upon face and hands and thrusting in its poison. To escape it, one must go to the mountains; far up on the fragrant slopes where the pine trees hang in air, and the torrent leaps down among them, and the blue gloom of the valley lies below, and the everlasting snows stretch far away behind, up and up against the sky. Here there are no poisonous insects to buzz and sting; the wanderer has ascended too high.

So in life we can escape the trivial vexations and irritations of life by rising above them to the height of some lofty thought, some beautiful idea, whence we can view the plains of daily existence with its petty cares and stings far, far below.

LILY WATSON.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF AN EAST END GIRL.

PART II.

A WEDDING.



One time my proposed expedition seemed threatened with extinction, for my family strongly objected to my running about the East End with no more efficient protector than Belinda Ann—on a bank holiday too!

In vain I painted her character in glowing colours; in vain I cited my hostess of the club as an authority that I should come to no harm. The family were obdurate. Either I must find someone to go with me who could look after me properly, or I must give up the idea.

I was loath to do the latter so I set about the former, and by great good luck discovered a lady who spent most of her time amongst Belinda Ann and her friends and knew the bride and her family intimately.

I admit it robbed the expedition of some of its fun to thus have a chaperon tacked on

to me, and there was a lurking doubt in my mind as to how Belinda Ann herself would regard the innovation. When, after a long, hot omnibus ride, we arrived at the place where we had appointed to meet her we caught sight of her waiting, my eyes anxiously sought her face to judge from its expression whether or no she would resent the unexpected addition to the party. Luckily she both knew and liked the lady in question (who shall be called Miss H.), and though for a moment her face clouded over, it soon brightened again, and, with a great air of importance, she bustled us off to the tram.

On the way I had time to note that she had evidently bestowed great pains on her person, for the straight fringe was elaborately curled and surmounted by a wonderful crimson plush hat, à la Gainsborough, adorned with a profusion of feathers to match shaded off to palest pink.

"That must have cost her a lot of money," I whispered to Miss H.; but the latter replied, "She belongs to a feather club, of course."

I did not understand what she meant, and there was no opportunity of then asking; but I resolved to inquire into this at some future period.

Meanwhile Belinda Ann, by means of a dexterous application of her thin sharp elbows and a running fire of chaff, secured us an entrance into the tram which was already inconveniently crowded in my opinion; but everyone was so heartily good-natured, no one could possibly show temper at being a little squeezed.

Belinda Ann ensconced herself near the door, where she kept a lively look-out for every fresh arrival, whom she greeted with some choice specimen of wit which, if replied to in the proper spirit, afforded her unbounded satisfaction.

During this period of waiting I was able to study, from the window of the tram, the fashionable hand-shake as practised by a lady with a market-basket taking leave of another matron on the pavement. There was a sort of perpendicular and horizontal movement combined about it which was very difficult to catch but

most effective, and I could not but admire the elegance with which it was done. It is, I believe, sacred to trams.

Presently the tram moved off, rather to my relief, for it was decidedly warm waiting in the sun, and we rolled smoothly along, Miss H. ever and anon pointing out objects of interest on the route.

"There's the bridegroom!" she whispered presently, clutching my arm; and, looking in the direction of her glance, I espied a well set-up young man emerging from a barber's shop.

Belinda Ann caught sight of him at the same time, and in a sarcastic undertone remarked, "My! Ain't 'e done 'isself proper?"

I suppose I looked mystified, and, indeed, it was Greek to me until Miss H. silently pointed to the sign over the door—"Shaving done here. Fresh water for every person." And even then I didn't quite see it till she explained that the latter was by no means a *sine qua non*, but that the bridegroom on this important occasion evidently thought it incumbent on him to do the thing in style!

Next we passed a church with an inscription outside to the effect that parties could be married there for sevenpence halfpenny.

I was still lost in wonder at this legend when a wedding-party emerged and made a wild rush for the tram. The bride came inside and the bridegroom went outside, and I felt grieved to think they should be separated so soon after their sevenpence-halfpenny worth. Judging from the bride's apparent age, I concluded that the youthful bridesmaid of ten was her eldest daughter.

At this moment a man plumped down next to me carrying a trio of remarkably lively puppies, and the remainder of the drive was rendered extremely hilarious by the antics of the small doggies, who persisted in swarming on to the floor every other minute, and then abjectly licking our boots.

"They don't allow live-stock inside the trams on Sundays," remarked Miss H., as she hauled up a puppy for the twentieth time and handed it over to its rightful owner. "Still," she added meditatively, "a man may get in holding a sack, not by the neck, but round the loins, so to speak, and if he lets go to get his fare or his handkerchief, you see the sack wriggle!"

I had not done laughing at this graphic description when Belinda Ann, who had been keeping a sharp look-out all this time, gave us the signal to dismount, which we did in a breathless scramble owing to the tram starting on again before we were well off the step.

I found there was still some little distance to walk before we arrived at the house, but everything was so new to me that I did not mind.

Thus, passing a second-hand clothier's window, my eye was at once caught by a white dress in the window labelled, "A boon to young ladies about to marry! Let out by the day!"

It was made of some soft silky material in the prevailing fashion and thoughtfully cut large enough to accommodate any figure, as of course any superfluity could be pinned over should the hirer happen to be of a sylph-like form!

"I s'pose I shall come ter that if any chap ever says 'Chairs' ter me!" remarked Belinda Ann, with a last glance at it as we tore ourselves away.

"Says what?" I inquired, not very elegantly, I fear.

"Chairs!" she replied shortly, for she took the surprise in my voice to imply a doubt of her ever wanting a wedding-dress.

"What in all the world has that to do with it?" I asked, after a moment's puzzled silence.

She surveyed me for a second with a sort of pitying scorn for my ignorance, and then proceeded to enlighten me.

"Why, yer see, yer may walk out with a feller fer months an' never get no forrader, so ter speak, or yer may chynge about with another feller an' no one think any harm of it; but if any on 'em mentions 'furniture' to yer, it's a sign that he means bizness, an' yer can begin ter think about yer trossax."

This tickled my fancy so much that I doubt if I should ever have stopped laughing if Belinda Ann had not shown signs of temper by remarking huffily, "In coorse I knows as 'ow tofsi don't manage it that wy; but yer asked me about it, an' it ain't bad fer all that."

"I think it's a perfectly charming plan," I put in hastily, smothering my mirth as well as I could; but I nearly went off again at the reflection that the innocent remark, "Can I get you a chair?" would be construed by an East End beauty into a proposal of marriage.

Belinda Ann did not quite recover her good humour till we arrived at the bride's mansion, which fortunately was not far off, for once there her smiles returned in full force, and she quite forgot my ill-timed merriment.

We stepped straight from the court into the banquetting-hall, without even the formality of a doorstep, and the bride received us in person, her mother being busy in the back premises over her toilette.

The heroine of the occasion was of such colossal proportions she might almost have gone about in a show, and her complexion matched her gown, which was of a warm brickdusty red.

This was not, however, the wedding garment, for, after having greeted us, she disappeared with Belinda Ann and many apologies to reappear later on in a really elegant grey silk, presented by Miss H. and her sister in fulfilment of a very old promise.

She had rather spoilt the effect by hanging round her neck a string of iridescent beads, so large that they looked like homœopathic globules, and wearing the inevitable be-feathered hat, this time of a crude violet hue; but otherwise she was all that could be desired, and was immensely admired.

Belinda Ann had added to her attire a huge lace collar and a silver chain, from which hung a locket to match about the size of a small warming-pan, and the party was completed by the bride's mother, also dressed in an old gown of Miss H.'s.

Now Miss H. being tall and slim, while Mrs. Hogg was of the same generous proportions as her daughter, the dress proved somewhat too scanty, so she had taken some of the material from the waist to eke out the bodice, and to hide this theft had donned a black velvet apron. It looked a little odd, perhaps, but on the whole was pronounced very fair, and we set off for the church. Not on foot, although the edifice was just round the corner. That would, indeed, have been a serious breach of etiquette on such an occasion. No! Two four-wheeled cabs had been chartered for the drive, and into these we packed, the bride, her mother and father (who turned up at the last minute in a fearful state of heat and nervousness) going in the first, and Belinda Ann, Miss H., and I taking the second.

An enthusiastic crowd was hanging round the porch cheering wildly when we alighted, and at first I thought that Miss Hogg must be the most popular girl in the East End; but I was soon undeceived. She was not the only expectant bride of the occasion, for Bank Holiday is a favourite East End wedding-day, for obvious reasons.

The crowd inside was so great, although perfectly orderly and reverent, that I could see little or nothing of the actual ceremony,

and was rather glad than not when, all formalities having been complied with, our party disentangled itself from the general *mêlée*, and we drove back in the same order as we had come, with the addition of the bridegroom, of course.

In our absence the table had been elegantly laid with wine-glasses of every shape, colour, and size, borrowed right and left for the occasion, each with half a sheet of clean notepaper stuck in it. I puzzled over these for some time, till I came to the conclusion that possibly this was in imitation of the serviettes placed in wine-glasses at restaurants.

As each guest appeared, he or she was hospitably pressed to say what he or she would take ("Give it a nyme!" was the general form of invitation), and he or she usually seemed quite prepared for the question and quite ready with an answer, for without any false delicacy they promptly replied, "Drop o' port!" This was immediately handed them, and there they sat in a row, never opening their mouths except to empty into them the aforesaid "drop o' port."

I was sorely troubled as to what to do with mine, which I would have gladly refused only that I was warned that it was considered as great an insult as to refuse in the real East to drink the cup of black coffee offered at the threshold; so there I sat with the rest, occasionally raising it to my lips, till an opportunity offered to stick it behind a flower-pot, where it may remain to this day for all I know.

The honeymoon was to be spent on Hampstead Heath, and we were pressed to accompany the party, but excused ourselves as politely as possible and shortly after took leave, as everyone was obviously aching to be off, though far too polite to say so.

Our presence had added great *éclat* to the proceedings in the opinion of our hosts, and when we took leave the bridegroom insisted on presenting each of us with seven Tangerine oranges!

Now he was by profession a fruiterer, and a kind Providence had thoughtfully endowed him with hands so large that he could easily hold seven oranges (or anything else for the matter of that) in one. My hands, unluckily, are not on the same liberal scale; consequently when he dropped the seven oranges into them, about six were bound to fall on the ground in spite of all my efforts. Of course, they rolled into all sorts of inaccessible corners, after their perverse nature; but the company collected them with unfailing good-humour, and my secret hope that one or two of them at least might be irrevocably lost was not realised.

We left Belinda Ann behind to share the forthcoming trip, and soon found ourselves in an omnibus rolling westwards.

"I never refuse little gifts of this kind," said Miss H., as she rescued an orange from bounding out of the door, "for it seems more friendly to accept. Besides, I know if they send or give me sixpennyworth of lemons, I can readily make it up to them later on by something costing half-a-crown."

I assented, and then remarked dreamily, "Those hats are the most wonderful erections!"

"They may not be very artistic," she replied, "but they are a sign of self-respect. The last thing a respectable woman parts with, as a rule, is her headgear, and the last thing a self-respecting man leaves off is having his boots cleaned. When you see a man with dirty boots, and a woman bare-headed, you may know they have touched the lowest depths."

I was still meditating on this when the omnibus stopped with a jerk, precipitating all my oranges into the gutter, and thus settling once for all the vexed question of how I was to get them home.

SOCIAL INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF AN EAST END GIRL.

By LA PETITE.

PART III.
THE LAUNCH.

I WAS sitting in the study one morning busily writing, when sounds of an altercation in the hall were followed by the door opening and the appearance of our parlour-maid, with indignation expressed in every line of her expressive and superior person. She had always been very superior, so much so that I frequently wondered why she continued to grace our quiet house, but now, as I glanced at her, I thought I perceived signs of her removing the light of her presence from us at no distant date.

"What is it, Jane?" I inquired mildly.

"If you please, miss," she replied, with an evident effort, "there's a young—pussan' as come, what says she must see you at once, which I told her you never saw no one in the mornin', an' ast 'er 'er bizness, which she says as it's 'ers an' not mine!" Here her emotion choked her, and enabled me to get in a word edgewise.

"What is she like?" I asked, rising hastily.

"Tall an' brazen-faced, with a fringe down to 'er eyes, an'——"

But I heard no more, for I was already in the hall, where I discovered Belinda Ann standing on the mat in an aggressive attitude, bristling all over, and with her arms akimbo.

At sight of her old enemy, the parlour-maid, who had followed me down, she gave an expressive snort, which was replied to by that functionary by a toss of her head and the up-lifting of an already "tip-tilted" nose. Fearful of the renewal of the "few words" they had evidently already had, I hurriedly greeted Belinda Ann, and drew her after me to a room at the top of the house, which at this time of day was always secure from interruption. Here I set to work to soothe her ruffled temper and hurt dignity, which had evidently been seriously upset, as for a long time all I could get out of her was, "What call 'ad she to give 'erself airs? Set 'er rup indeed! I don't 'ave ter 'ire soldiers ter walk out with me o' Sundys!" and suchlike unprofitable exclamations.

By-and-by, however, she became more cheerful, and when I produced some refreshments in the shape of lemonade, biscuits and bananas, she had regained her usual serenity. I may as well say here that there was a curious point of resemblance between Belinda Ann, a daughter of the people, and the highest in the land, and that was, that no matter how strange her surroundings might be to her, she adapted herself to them at once, and never exhibited vulgar curiosity or "gave herself away," as she would have put it, by expressing surprise or admiration.

Thus, if I had expected her to be impressed by the size of the house or elegance of the furniture, I should have been disappointed. Like the thorough woman of the world that she was, she lounged in a velvet arm-chair as if she had been accustomed to it from babyhood, and though her bright, dark eyes glanced into every corner, not a word or a look escaped her to prove that it was all new to her. As a rule one finds this calm *sang-froid* and *savoir faire* only at the extreme ends of the social scale, though of course there are exceptions.

All this time I was quite in the dark still as to why she had honoured me with a visit, but when she had eaten her third banana, swept all the biscuit crumbs in her lap into her mouth, and finished the lemonade, she remarked, with her usual abruptness, "Want ter see a launch?"

"Certainly!" I replied, with commendable presence of mind. "When, and where?"

"Now!" she returned with equal brevity. "There's one on to-day down at Victoria Docks at three o'clock, an' I think we can just abaht do it."

"But it isn't Bank Holiday! How is it you are able to leave your work?" I in-judiciously asked, for Belinda Ann stiffened and froze at once, and looked for a minute as if she repented of having come.

She thought better of it, however, for presently she remarked briefly, "Don't often get a launch, when we do we tyke a holiday. If they don't like it at the factory, they ken lump it. Needn't come if yer don't want!" I was getting used by this time to her curious way of talking like a sixpenny telegram, so I hastened to assure her I wanted to come very much, and as it was obviously now or never, I left a hurried note for my absent family to say where I had gone, dressed in frantic haste, and was soon ready to accompany Belinda Ann.

There were two ways of getting to the docks, by Underground or omnibus. The latter took much longer, but as I have a constitutional dislike to the Underground, I proposed the alternative route, and my companion politely assented.

"We must take a Blackwall from Piccadilly," I remarked, as I stepped briskly out, "but when we get there, I'll put myself into your hands, Belinda."

Again she agreed, having become unusually quiet, and not till we turned into Regent Street did she regain her cheerfulness. I did not particularly notice it at the time, but long afterwards I found out the reason, which was briefly this. There were two ways of reaching Piccadilly from our house, one being down Regent Street, crowded at that time of day, and the other down deserted back streets.

Luckily I chose the former, and Belinda had been watching to see which I should take, being quite ready to assume that I was ashamed of her if I had gone the quiet way.

I certainly had no idea of minding being seen with her, as the worst thing that could happen would be that my friends might think me rather eccentric in my choice of society, but as I was doing nothing wrong, their opinion troubled me little.

Belinda Ann had evidently got herself up with a special eye to my company. A well-worn but neat black serge skirt was surmounted by the inevitable blouse, evidently picked up cheap at some second-hand clothes shop. It had once been handsome, being of shot pink and blue *glacé* silk trimmed lavishly with iridescent trimming and quantities of cheap lace, but now most of its glories had departed, and personally I should have preferred their absence altogether, but still it suited her in a bizarre, picturesque way, although it attracted more attention than was quite desirable. It was surmounted by her old black straw hat, from which, however, she had removed the dirty white flowers.

She looked better in her workaday dress and apron, but it would be difficult to tell her so, and I was still busy revolving plans in my mind for her education in taste, when we arrived in Piccadilly, and in the wild excite-

ment of "boarding" the Blackwall omnibus, my thoughts were reduced to chaos. Belinda Ann, with rare delicacy, climbed on the top, leaving me to sit inside alone, so I had plenty of leisure for thinking during the long hot drive.

Oh, it was long and it was hot! Many times during our progress I thought regretfully of my favourite window-seat at home, with its usual accompaniments of an interesting book or a little languid work.

I was in for it now, however, as I realised more fully when the omnibus stopped and we got out. Belinda Ann indicated another very small specimen of the same vehicle round which a surging crowd was having a sort of free fight, at sight of which I basely deserted my colours.

"Let's take a cab, Belinda!" I suggested weakly, but this proved easier said than done. Not a single cab was to be had for love or money, and it really looked as if we should get no further.

At last a small but sympathetic bystander volunteered the information that the omnibus yard was not far off, and if we went there we should have the first choice. Cheered by this idea we hastened thither, and though our joy was rather damped by finding that the same happy thought had struck about twenty other people, we dashed recklessly into the thick of the fray, and after a breathless struggle, landed in a triumphant heap on the floor inside. Someone trod on my skirt and nearly tore it off, but Belinda Ann did such noble execution with her sharp elbows and sharper tongue that this was my only mishap, and we subsided into seats with just elation.

Belinda Ann especially was so pleased at our success that it made her unusually "chirpy," which state of mind led up to a regrettable incident. A gentleman in corduroy mounting to the roof discovered that his "young lydy" was seated inside the omnibus. Pausing therefore half-way up the staircase, regardless of the impatient throng behind him, he poked his head under the lamp and tried to persuade her to come outside with him. The lady was coy and the gentleman urgent, which somewhat prolonged matters, until at last a West-Endier immediately behind the impatient lover lost his temper and observed irritably—

"Now then, my good fellow, don't keep us here all day! If you're going up, get on!"

The "good fellow" turned on him at once, his "young lydy" of course sided with her *fiancé*, and Belinda Ann stuck loyally to her class by remarking in her peculiarly penetrating voice—

"Ho, yuss! 'Cause 'e's got on a nigh 'at, 'e thinks the 'ole bloomin' 'bus belongs ter rim! Yuss hindeed."

I was covered with confusion, and vainly tried to quiet her, but the unlucky young "toff" made matters worse by defending himself.

"Well," he said fiercely, "he has no right to block the whole staircase!"

"No, in course not!" agreed Belinda Ann, with dangerous politeness and withering sarcasm. "Most inconsiderate I calls it. Boo—hoo—hoo—oo!"

The war-cry was taken up all round till its unfortunate victim was only too glad to hide his diminished head in its despised "topper" anywhere "out of the four-mile radius" of the savage whoops with which the neighbourhood fairly rang.

As for me, I sat in my corner scarlet with

embarrassment and an hysterical desire to laugh, and was thankful when at last the omnibus moved off.

The rest of the journey was accomplished in peace, but we still had some distance to walk when we got out and joined the throng of happy, careless, jovial holiday-makers trudging along in the sun.

The crowd was a queer mixture of West and East, grand ladies in the most fashionable toilettes being obliged to elbow their way through the friendly costers and merry factory girls amid a chorus of "What ho! What price me? 'Ow's thet fur style?" and so on.

I was thankful that so far I had escaped their embarrassing notice, and kept close to Belinda as we streamed over a level crossing and approached the water's edge.

Do not suppose she was dumb all this while. Far from it, for she it was who led the various war-cries, and as she would have termed it, "kept her end up"; but in the midst of her wildest sallies, she never forgot me, and more than once when some rough girls and men jostled against me unnecessarily, she gave them "what for!" vigorously.

At last she landed me, flushed, panting and dishevelled, but triumphant, in a cosy nook on the wharf formed by huge piles of timber on three sides and the water on the fourth. The planks were so arranged as to form a seat below and a little pent-house roof above, while I enjoyed an uninterrupted view of the beautiful battleship which was to be launched presently.

There was just room for one and no more, so Belinda Ann stood at the entrance and surveyed me as if I were her invention and she had just taken out a patent for me! I was less amused by this than usual as I was lost in admiration at the sight before me.

I had always heard that a launch at the docks is made a general holiday in the neighbourhood, which accounted for the dense crowds around. I am not now alluding to the stands erected for the aristocratic spectators—though these were packed—but to the uninvited guests, who literally swarmed everywhere, so that you might have walked on their heads. Every roof, bridge, hole and corner was thick with sightseers, and the water was black with boats. The ships being built in various other parts of the docks had also been "boarded," and not a square inch of ground or water was uncovered.

I recognised many of the girls I had seen at the Club, some with a bashful-looking young man in attendance, with whom they were evidently "walking out," but most of them arm-in-arm with four or five girl-friends, all in a state of innocent high spirits, shrieking with laughter at nothing at all and indulging in practical jokes at each other's expense.

Presently a flourish of music from various bands in the vicinity announced the arrival of the Royal personages who were to launch the

boat, and a long string of firemen came hurriedly through the crowd to form a guard of honour.

Each man had to bend under a rope which was stretched across the path, and this formed fine sport for Belinda Ann's irrepressible friends, who knocked off their helmets, tripped them up, and otherwise harassed them as long as they were within reach.

I thought Belinda Ann looked on rather regretfully, but she would not desert her self-imposed sentry duty, and turned a deaf ear to her "pals' " invitations to join them.

From my place I could not see distinctly what happened, although I knew the Royal duchess was to strike away the supporting posts with a mallet which would launch the ship, and then smash a bottle of champagne against its side to name it; but all I actually saw was its huge bulk gliding majestically at first and then more quickly down and away, while a chorus of shouts, bells, and indiscriminate noises arose as it went.

Then Belinda Ann bent down to me and whispered, almost savagely, "Let's get out o' this, d'yer 'ear? Somethin's bound ter 'appen!"

"Why? What?" I gasped, rather taken aback by her manner and words, and disposed to remain in my comfortable corner until the crowd had dispersed a little.

She vouchsafed no reply, but, clutching my arm, dragged me unceremoniously to my feet and piloted me back the way we had come, clearing a path through the throng as if by magic, interposing her broad person between me and the rough element, and forging ahead as if pursued by wild beasts. I could not understand her sudden haste, and, being quite breathless, tried to stop and rest, but she pulled me relentlessly on.

Once, near the level crossing, I saw a girl being led past, as if ill, followed by someone carrying a bundle of wet clothes, and I tried to draw Belinda Ann's attention to it, but she chose that identical moment to dash across the rails in face of the warning shout, "Express coming!" and I had to fly after her. She never stopped or spoke till we got to the Underground Railway Station, when, for the first time, she looked at me and said shortly—"What next?"

Then I noticed that she was white and looked strangely scared, and concluding she was faint, I replied, "We'll go home by train!" and diving into the station I committed the extravagance of buying two first-class tickets, as the crush in the third class was not to be thought of.

A train came in five minutes afterwards, and we secured two seats so that the journey home was quickly accomplished, rather to my relief, for Belinda Ann really looked ill.

As we drew near home I heard boys shouting, "Haccident at a Launch! Horful Scenes!" but somehow I did not associate

it with what I had just come from, and Belinda Ann never said a word till I had landed her in the upstairs room at home which we had left so gaily that morning.

I plied her with tea and cake and bread-and-butter until the colour began to come back to her face, and then I said—

"Why, Belinda, what has come over you, and why were you in such a tearing hurry, and what did you mean by saying something would happen?"

"What I said," she replied shortly; "and I was right too. That ship'll be unlucky, you see if 'tain't, and what's more, they'll 'ave trouble in gettin' sailors to man 'er, you mark my words!"

"I don't understand you one bit," I said impatiently.

"Then you didn't 'ear as the bottle was filled with seltzer or some such stuff 'stead o' champagne?" she asked excitedly.

"No," I answered, "but I don't see what difference that could make."

"Sailors would," she returned darkly. "An' besides, the bottle didn't break an' 'ad ter be smashed afterwards."

"Belinda Ann," I exclaimed severely, "how can you be so wicked? Don't you know that it's very wrong to take notice of omens and to be superstitious and to believe in luck and chance?"

She screwed up her mouth and pouted her lips in a way she had when not convinced and too polite to say so (which latter was not often!), and then said doggedly, "Then why was it all those people were thrown into the water by the back-wash, an' lots on 'em drowned?" which was the first intimation I had of what turned out to be a terrible accident.

I regret to say that on this occasion (the first time I had tried to get in "a word in season") Belinda apparently got the best of it, but for once she bore her victory modestly, being too subdued by the catastrophe and the danger which had approached me to be very jubilant or to triumph openly.

Now I understood her flight, for she was afraid lest more horrors were to come, and, regarding me as a precious piece of costly treasure in her care, she had never rested till I was landed in comparative safety.

She had even shielded me from the sight of it all, and the chivalrous soul, who would never have known fear on her own account, had yielded to panic for my sake.

Thus I was made aware of another characteristic of my East-Enders, namely, the vein of superstition which underlay the practical matter-of-fact front she presented to the workaday world.

There was a deep-seated belief in her mind in such things as luck and chance, as I now found out, and when she left me that night she was still firmly convinced that the ship we had seen launched that day would never come to any good!

"OUR HERO."

A TALE OF THE FRANCO-ENGLISH WAR NINETY YEARS AGO.

By AGNES GIBERNE, Author of "Sun, Moon and Stars," "The Girl at the Dower House," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATTLE OF CORUÑA.

WELL might Moore cast anxious glances towards the harbour of Coruña, where the vessels from Vigo should have been. They had been delayed by contrary winds; and this failure on their part to arrive in time was a most serious matter. The British Army, brought thus far in

safety, would now lie without the means of escape in a narrow trap, between Scylla and Charybdis, hemmed in by the pitiless ocean on one side, by the ever-increasing hordes of the enemy on the other.

With unfaltering courage he at once set himself to examine the position, assigning the troops to their various quarters, some in the town of Coruña,

some in villages hard by. One range of rocky hills, three or four miles off, would have been the right line of defence; but Moore had not men enough to occupy it. He saw at once that, should he attempt to do so, the French might be able to turn his position, and to cut him off from embarkation.

That post of vantage had to be left to the foe. Moore was obliged to content

I had been warned again and again by friends who had long experience in dealing with Chinamen, not to interfere at all, but to leave things *entirely* to them. So long as the work is fairly well done and things are clean, what does the rest matter? Most of them are by no means extravagant or wasteful, as servants go; but if such a one should fall to your lot, you may as well dismiss him at once, for you will never persuade him to make the least change. They are so exceedingly stubborn that interference, if it does no harm, is little likely to do any good. In most cases where a change is demanded, they will say "allie lightie," and go on doing their own way.

As I myself do the choosing and buying of the meat, I also go through the form of ordering how it shall be cooked and prepared for each meal. If my orders accord with his *Celestial ideas*, they are carried out, and if not, they are not. And that is the end of it. He always serves up something nice, and does not waste, which is surely good enough for any reasonable being.

I confess I do resent a little the half covert smile with which I am received in the morning when I go into the kitchen to give these bogus orders; but I brazen it out, and struggle through the form with the best dignity I can.

One lady friend, when advising me never to interfere about the work, told me of a striking experience she had before she learnt her lesson.

She kept a large boarding-school for girls, and employed a number of Chinamen. The cook, being a very capable and respectable fellow, was the acknowledged head over the others, engaging them and dismissing them on his own responsibility. That was the plan which she had found the best, and as long as he was satisfied, all worked as smoothly as a machine, for he belonged, as most of them do,

to some secret society, and whether he was a "high binder," as seemed likely, or not, they feared and obeyed him as they would never have feared or obeyed her.

One unlucky day, however, she took it into her head to go into the kitchen and prepare some small thing which he had cooked once or twice in a manner that did not please her. She had told him that she did not like it so, but next time it was served in just the same fashion, and she was annoyed. She went bravely into her own kitchen, and prepared it as she liked, leaving him in quiet possession as soon as this was finished.

A large school is a busy place, and no one had time to notice anything unusual or strange till the hour for dinner drew near. Then suddenly it struck all the little community that the house was very still; there was no smell of dinner, and in the dining-room, when the door was hastily flung open, there were no preparations for the meal.

Our friend, startled and uneasy, hurried to the kitchen, to find everything in perfect order, but no sign of Chinese activity, and the fires of the range all grey and cold. A quick search convinced her that they were alone in the house, and in a great state of wonder and excitement she and her friends got together a cold, picnic sort of meal, and ate it up, discussing meanwhile what they should do. As the Chinese *chef* had been exceedingly well treated, and had also been some years with them, they felt very indignant that he should have played them such a trick for so slight an offence, for my friend recognised that she had committed an offence.

They determined in their wrath that they would have no more Chinamen; they would employ nice, decent women, with whom they could reason, and who would understand one's point of view. They telephoned at once to an employment agency in the nearest town, asking for the best girls that could be had, at

such short notice, to be sent out to them at once.

Soon they arrived, and were spreading confusion and discomfort all over the house—a wretchedly incompetent set. They were all dismissed, and a fresh batch sent out—but, alas! no better than the first.

Then the girls and their teachers, in desperation, determined to do their own work until they had time to make some better plans. All this had taken up three or four days, and one morning our friend was hard at work sweeping her own drawing-room carpet, and making a great noise over it, when the brush was taken out of her hands by a quiet firm grasp, and glancing up, she saw her Chinese *chef*, looking particularly neat and business-like, after all the tawdry finery of the women servants. He said quietly, "Me do lis; you no do such sing," and went on with the sweeping as though there had been no break whatsoever in his regular work. Being both breathless with her sweeping, and very glad to hand it over to someone else, naturally also a good deal taken aback, she murmured something or other and went quietly out of the room, and then discovered that all about the house were quiet, quick-moving figures, clad in the familiar white jackets, busy about their separate duties, just as though they had been there all the time. The lesson was very effectual in her case, for never again did she attempt the least interference.

This seems to be an exceedingly long account of domestic affairs, but being so unlike our English edition of such troubles, it may be of interest, or, at least, it may serve to enhance the feelings of comfort and luxury of those at home who can command a well-trained cook, and housemaid, and parlour-maid, not to mention the useful charwoman, and all for less money than we pay our one Chinaman.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF AN EAST END GIRL.

By LA PETITE.

PART IV.

CHAIRS!

It so chanced that I did not see Belinda Ann for some long time after the launch.

Illness and a trip to Switzerland came between us, and when I returned to England the Club had not yet resumed its winter meetings.

The moment it did so, however, I took an early opportunity of visiting it, and to my joy Belinda Ann arrived shortly after me.

I pounced on her at once and drew her into a secluded corner, where we could talk unobserved.

"Belinda," I began eagerly, "I want you to take me to your Feather Club one day. Will you?"

She put her head on one side and glanced at me sideways, as was her way when in doubt, and remarked—

"There ain't nothink ter see, yer know. We just pys in our money every week, an' the one who draws the winnin' number gits the feather that week, an' then we begins all over agyne, but I've left that an' jined a furniture club now," and she gave me another sidelong look.

I was so full of my own ideas that I did not particularly notice her evident desire to be asked why, but exclaimed—

"I did not know you had other sorts of clubs."

"Bless yer, yuss!" retorted Belinda Ann, with all her old contempt for my lamentable ignorance. "There's furniture clubs, an' crockery clubs, an' photergraph clubs, an' draperies an' boot clubs, an' I dun know what all!"

"And how much do you pay?" I asked. "Well, it depends," she replied cautiously. "It runs from anythink from thruppence to five bob, accordin' ter succumstances, but I'll tyke yer ter one ef yer like, though there ain't nothink whatever ter see."

I closed with the offer at once, and then asked what she had been doing all this time.

"Eaps!" she answered laconically; and then remarked in a would-be off-hand manner, "I'm a-walkin' hout with a young feller down our court."

"Oh!" I replied, not specially impressed, as this was a very everyday affair.

"An' 'e's sed 'Chairs' ter me!" she added, with an elaborate assumption of indifference and an unsuccessful attempt not to look triumphant.

"Oh, Belinda!" I exclaimed, grasping at once what this meant, "I am glad. That is why you joined the furniture club?"

She nodded, pleased at my intelligence, and added complacently—

"An' I've jined the sewin' class, so's I ken myke my own trossax."

I fully approved of this, and inquired as to when the marriage was to take place.

She pursed up her lips and shook her head solemnly, as she replied—

"Not yet awhile. I've no fancy fer startin' too soon an' bein' brought up with a jerk, an' I wants ter myke sure of a comferble plyce ter begin with," which showed me what I had always known, namely, that Belinda Ann was in many ways above her class.

"I means ter 'ave a room ter myself any'ow," she went on. "Why, ef you'll berlieve me"—warming with her subject—"down Spitalfields wy there was once four families as 'ad one room atween 'em. They each 'ad one corner, an' one man lived in the middle, but dear, they didn't mind, an' got on well enough till the man in the middle took in a lodger, an' then there was a row 'cos they sed that was jest a little too much."

I heartily agreed, though the story was not new to me any more than it will be to you.

We parted, having made an appointment for the following week, so a few days afterwards found me under her guidance, trying to find out something about the clubs.

As we walked she showed me notices in various shop-windows of "Clubs held here," but the one we finally entered was of a very humble description, and the proprietress, a wizened little hunchback, looked suspiciously at me and was most reluctant, even at Belinda Ann's request, to explain the mode of procedure.

There was not much to tell, she said stiffly, and nothing to see.

The girls just paid their sixpence a week, and the number of members, of course, had to tally with the value of what they wanted.

Hers was a boot-club, and, as coster girls are notoriously fastidious about the quality of their boots, seven-and-six and eight-and-six is the price aimed at, so she had fifteen members just now, and a friend of hers had seventeen.

They were strictly honourable, and always "stood up" to what they had undertaken, even though they might find it a tax to produce the weekly subscription regularly; and when a girl had secured the article for which she had joined the club, she never by any chance "cried off," but went on paying till all the members were supplied.

Of course it was not everyone who could be admitted to these privileges, and, as a rule, strangers were not particularly welcomed unless well vouched for by an old member, as there was always the chance of their being winners early and then "crying off" the rest of their subscription.

The club was mainly composed of friends who rarely met at the "club-holder's," except on the occasion of the weekly draw.

Of course, if a girl could spare the money, there was no objection to her buying two tickets, thus enjoying two chances and also helping to hasten matters, and there had been cases where the members, hearing that one of their old "chums" (or "pals," as they call it) was in sore want, voluntarily kept the club going another week, and then handed it all over to her, with the club-holder's consent, of course.

The usual method was to put fifteen pieces of paper in a bag, on one being written the number of weeks the club was old, and the member who drew out the marked paper was able to buy the boots that week, and so on.

"Then it really is a lottery!" I remarked meditatively.

"No, t'ain't," she snapped sharply; "it's a club!" And after that I could not get another word out of her, but I gathered later on that she derived her profit from the draper or bootshop visited, who allowed her so much for every "ticket" presented to him, and that she often had more than one club running at a time.

Belinda Ann was so obviously crestfallen at the poor result of our excursion that I hastened to inquire after her "young man," upon which she brightened up, informed me his name was Joe, that he was in the coster line and owned a "barrer an' moke" of his own. He sold anything that was in season, and Belinda Ann had grave thoughts of giving up her present occupation and accompanying him on his rounds.

I privately thought this would be a "come-down" for her, remembering the draggled-tailed, slatternly women who usually pursue this line of business, but she was so visibly elated over the whole business that I could not bear to be a wet blanket.

She was dying to introduce Joe to me, and as I was no less curious to see him, I agreed to attend the sewing-class one night, as she proudly remarked, "'E allus fetches me 'ome 'isself, which is more nor what most blokes 'ud do," and indeed I found this to be the case, as courtship in the East End is a very prosaic and matter-of-fact affair, conducted on both sides with scant romance and without any of those little amenities usual in the West End.

Accordingly I attended the next sewing meeting, at which Belinda Ann showed me with pride the neat nightgowns she was making, with little tucks and a frill of embroidery down the front, having already completed a serviceable stout petticoat or two.

She was the best worker in the class and the others readily acknowledged her superiority, coming to her for assistance or advice, and admiring her skill with a whole-hearted generosity which had not a trace of jealousy or envy about it.

I was sure Belinda Ann was not sorry to let me see her in a new light, and as I sat apart and watched her I saw and appreciated the subtle change that her new prospects had wrought in her. She was sobered and softened, more womanly and more responsible. She had perhaps lost the bizarre and picturesque charm which had been hers, but she had gained in qualities which would be more useful to her in the battle of life, and of which she might have dire need. There had always been the makings of a noble woman in the rough undisciplined factory-girl, and no true friend of hers could regret the disappearance of characteristics which, while making her more interesting and less commonplace, were not likely to help her much in her struggle for existence.

Not that she was less ready than of yore with "chaff," and I heard her joining more than once in the shrieks of laughter called forth by an oddly-shaped pattern or an ill-cut garment.

The ladies at the head of the class were wise enough to join in, even when the joke was against themselves, and to take in good part the various disrespectful and scornful remarks about their knowledge of needlework made in stage-whispers all round them.

I do not think any of the girls really cared about sewing, and some of them were frightfully slow workers. One girl had been at work on the same garment for over a year, and as she came late and left early, it seemed likely to last another twelve months at least.

The nominal hours were from eight to ten, but they dropped in at all times, and some only stayed a few minutes.

One girl put in about three stitches and then rolled her work up in an untidy bundle, crammed it into her bag (a lady had presented each girl with a bag in which to keep her work clean), and remarking, "I can't sew with coarse cotton like that," disappeared without another word of explanation or apology. They could bring their own materials if they liked, but long-cloth and flannelette were provided, and they could then purchase the garments they made at cost price.

There was a piano in the room, but music as a rule was impossible, the girls' healthy lungs preventing anything short of a drum being heard. One started a song and the others joined in, which was all right as long as they all sang the same, but when half-a-dozen different tunes were all being shouted out at once, the noise was rather appalling.

By degrees the room emptied till only Belinda Ann and myself were left, even the founders having retired to a neighbouring class-room to put on capes and bonnets. I ought to have mentioned before that the meeting was held in a Board School which the authorities kindly lent for the one night in the week.

Well, the clock began to strike ten, and I felt really sorry for Belinda Ann, whose anxious glances at the door were getting more and more frequent.

The tardy arrival of the swain, whose devotion she had been extolling, was doubly vexing to a proud girl of her calibre, since it would, she considered, make me think that she had been "gassing" unduly about him, besides which she was not at all likely to put up with neglect in any shape or form.

The slow minutes dragged inexorably on, and she was just rolling up her work with a great show of nonchalance, when a lumpy and by no means fairly footfall sounded on the flagged yard outside, and a healthy whistle

(in which, however, a nice ear might have detected some trepidation) gave us to understand that the owner had "knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road."

I glanced at Belinda, who stopped folding as if she had been shot, hastily unrolled everything and started sewing again with her nose in the air and the light of battle in her eye.

I was not at all sure that even my presence would save the unlucky Joe from a sound rating, but when the whistling and the footsteps abruptly ceased together, and an apologetic double-shuffle at the door forced her to look round, she evidently considered that the scolding had better wait, and merely said haughtily—

"Ow, there y'are at larst! Come on an' show yerself ter ther lydy an' mind yer manners!"

This was scarcely calculated to set him entirely at his ease, and as I could plainly see he was already suffering agonies of bashfulness I met him half-way (literally as well as metaphorically) and, having said how pleased I was to see him, held out my hand.

He was evidently unprepared for this, and having wiped his own elaborately on his corduroys, he gave it a final polish with his cap before venturing to respond.

A rather awkward pause ensued, which was happily broken by the ladies, who now returned to the room ready to go home, and who all seemed to know Joe very well. While he was answering their questions, I was able to have a good look at him, and I must admit I was disappointed in his appearance.

I had not expected anything heroic or romantic, of course, but, really, Belinda Ann's betrothed was distressingly plain.

His hair was an unmistakable red, and cropped so short as to suggest his having lately lodged at Her Majesty's expense. His eyes were a watery grey, with very pink rims and no eyelashes to speak of, and his mouth was so capacious it really quite alarmed you when he yawned, as he did presently with engaging frankness.

He was obviously a good bit younger than the bride-elect, but this is not unusual, and besides Belinda Ann would always have been the leading spirit anyhow.

He was physically smaller, too, being so stunted in growth as to make her look like a young giantess, and a stubbly attempt at a moustache made him seem even more boyish.

By the time I had completed my survey we were all ready to go, and as the other ladies were returning by the Underground, Joe and Belinda offered to escort me to the omnibus.

"Joe's got two tickets for the Vic. to-morrer night," Belinda remarked presently.

It seemed to me a pity that Joe should spend his hard-earned and much-needed money on so questionable an amusement, and I ventured to say so, in very delicate language of course.

"Ow, 'e ain't pyd fer 'em!" returned Belinda Ann reassuringly, "a friend o' 'is goes on in the crowd, an' ken pass in two friends when 'e likes. That's 'ow it is."

The next time I attended the sewing-class I asked her how she liked it, and nearly had my nose snapped off in return. For some reason (I shrewdly suspected that Joe and she had had a "tiff") she was in a grievously bad temper, and had already quarrelled with everyone in the room except me. Now it was my turn, and as she turned on me with a gloomy frown I felt sorry I had spoken.

"Like it?" she remarked, viciously biting off her cotton with her strong white teeth. "I never seed anythink more morotonous in all my born days! Call thet a ply? I calls it a reglar 'owlin' swindle!"

"Why? What was the matter with it?" I inquired mildly. "What was it called?"

"Fast!" she retorted ferociously, and for a minute I wondered what she meant, till it dawned on me that she probably meant *Faust*. "Well, what happened?" I coaxed. "You might just tell me, Belinda."

"Ow, I dun know," she answered sulkily. "There was a sort of a cellar plyce, kinder prison, with a old cove a-reading in a book, an' then 'e began ter jaw, and 'e could do it too. I thought 'e'd never leave off, an' I'd just said ter my Joe, 'What's thet there old cove a-doing of?' when there comes fireworks, an' someone in red 'ops out of 'em, an' 'e don't bergin ter jaw! My word, it was sick'nin'!" and she relapsed into gloomy silence.

"But, Belinda," I put in, "they are obliged

to talk to let you know what the story is about. If they did it all without speaking, you might not understand it."

"An' small loss," she retorted uncompromisingly. "I didn't understand it as it was. In one part three or four people went into a church, an' I says, sarcastick-like, 'It must be a weddin', sech lots o' people agoin' to church,' but Joe says it was meant there was a service agoin' on, an' all I ken say is it was a werry poor congregation."

"Oh, of course, it is all make-believe," I said soothingly. "They had not really got a church there, you know, and the people were not attending a service inside but only pretending to."

"Well, I 'aven't got the time nor the money ter spend on lookin' at things wot ain't true," she replied with decision, "an' wot's more, I sha'n't let my Joe go neither. It ain't wuth

it," which was astonishingly sensible of her, I thought.

While heartily approving of her decision, I could not resist asking her whether what she called "fireworks" had not pleased her.

"Purty well," she replied reflectively, "I've seen better ones, but at leastes they was real. There was one scenè with a founting where the gals shunted that cove in red, an' then the founting ran fire, but I spose that was make-believe too," and, alas, I was unable to deny it.

I was rather relieved to find that her first visit to the theatre was likely to be her last, and had certainly not given her a taste for that sort of amusement (which I had been half afraid it might), and, by dint of great exertion on my part, I managed to restore her wonted good-humour before we parted.

(To be continued.)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

GIRLS' EMPLOYMENTS.

B. G. (*Employment in the Colonies*).—We hope you will observe this answer, as you have not given a pseudonym. It is, of course, a very serious question whether you would do wisely or rightly to leave your present comfortable situation where your services are valued in order to seek employment abroad. So far as you yourself are concerned, it would seem probable that if you have made yourself useful to one household, you would to another. But in dealing with your employers a frank explanation would probably be best. Tell them that you have this strong desire to see something of the world outside your own country; but that you would not like to leave at a moment when, by so doing, you would be putting them to inconvenience. We can hardly doubt that your employers will meet you in a similar spirit, and will try to arrange matters so that you may leave England at the right time of year for emigration purposes. If you wish to leave this season, you should lose no time in taking lessons in cookery. You do not say where you live, but nowadays there are few localities without either a regular school of cookery or some evening classes at which cookery is taught. If you can make yourself a really good cook, Canada would be the most suitable country to which you could betake yourself. According to the latest report of the Emigrants' Information Office (31, Broadway, Westminster, S.W.), cooks earn much more than general servants, £25 a year being frequently paid. In the north-west cooks receive as much as £5 a month, or at the rate of £60 a year. You should not leave for Canada later than September, as the winter, which is severe, begins in October. If you could go earlier it would be better, otherwise you should wait till April of next year. The British Women's Emigration Association, Imperial Institute, Kensington, W., would advise and help you further if you would apply to the Secretary. You should also make a note of the address of the Women's Protective Immigration Society, 84, Osborne Street, Montreal, and of the Girls' Home of Welcome, 272, Assiniboine Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba. To these institutions you could turn if you wanted a lodging or help in seeking a good situation.

DAISY (*One Year's Training in a General Hospital*).—General hospitals—the qualifications of which carry weight in the nursing world—almost invariably receive probationers for not less than two years' training. Three years is an ordinary limit, and even four years are required by some of the best training schools. The only alternative course you could pursue is to enter some hospital as a paying probationer. You would be required to pay thirteen guineas per quarter; this would cover board, lodging, and tuition, but not uniform or laundry. It is possible that at the end of six months a paying probationer, who has shown an aptitude for nursing, may be invited to join the regular nursing staff of the hospital. If such an invitation were made to you, you would do wisely to accept it, for your position as a private nurse would be strengthened by the fact that you had undergone a full course of hospital training. We advise you to offer yourself as a paying probationer to the Middlesex Hospital, Mortimer Street, London, W., or the Royal Free Hospital, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. If you prefer to remain in Scotland, you might apply to the Matron of the Northern Infirmary, Inverness. Here candidates are received for one year only and are paid a salary. This institution, however, is much smaller than either of the London hospitals above-mentioned, and could not offer you so complete a knowledge of nursing in all its branches.

DORIS (*Hospital Training*).—Hospitals do not receive girls as probationers who are so young as eighteen. You must wait patiently, we regret to say, till you are two or three and twenty. In the meantime try to discover whether any evening classes are being held in your neighbourhood at which you could study ambulance work. Perhaps you could attend a polytechnic and learn other things as well, such, for instance, as cookery, which is a most useful subject for a nurse to understand. Indeed, if you occupied the next few years in obtaining complete expertness in all the domestic arts, you would find in later life that the time had been well spent.

A. E. T. (*Situation as Under-Nurse*).—As you are young and have not yet been out in service, it might be better for you not to come to London at first, but to seek a situation in your own locality. The Matron of the Girls' Boarding Home, 5, Abbey Street, Carlisle; or Mrs. Chalker, Ladies' Association for the Care of Girls Training Home, 8, George Street, Carlisle, would doubtless be kind enough to give you the address of some thoroughly respectable registry office in the North of England, through which you could seek a situation. You are too young to enter any hospital.

M. D. de J. (*Veterinary Surgeons*).—The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons does not at present admit women to membership; consequently women cannot practise in this country with the English qualification. There are many women who breed horses, and who, no doubt, are quite capable of acting as "vets" in an amateur capacity. But women have not gone further in this direction at present.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ROSEBUD.—White velvet, if not very much soiled, can be cleaned at home with flour rubbed in well, and then brushed out; and this process may be repeated till it is clean.

THELMA.—If you do not wish to mark your underlinen with your own initials, why not wait till you are married, and mark it then with your new ones? The father of the bride should pay for the carriages in which the bridal party goes to church; the bridegroom pays for his own, and also for that in which the newly-married pair depart from the church and the house.

THEO.—1. The great writer on the subject was Lavater, and there is a cheap edition of his book, but most libraries contain it.—2. We cannot suggest methods of earning money when we do not know what you can do, nor your age and position.

EVE.—1. There are exhibitions held in a large number of provincial centres, at any of which you might exhibit your paintings. There is one at Newbury, Berks, and many towns in that part of England, but as you do not give an address, we cannot help you.—2. You must make an arrangement with some shop (a greengrocer, perhaps) to sell your flowers.

FRITZ C.—The word "lacustrine" is derived from the Latin *lacus*, a lake. It means anything pertaining to lakes or swamps. It is used especially of those lake dwellings which have been found at various times and places, in which prehistoric peoples have lived for protection and better security. The most famous of these were discovered a few years ago in the Lake of Bienné, in Switzerland.

J. J.—We do not think that Di Vernon was an historical character. Rob Roy, of course, was such, as it was a nickname given to Robert MacGregor, who assumed the name of Campbell, when the Clan MacGregor was outlawed by the Scotch Parliament in 1602. He has been called the Scottish Robin Hood.

Topsy should certainly offer to pay for herself; but if the person she accompanies wishes to do so, she can accept the offer with thanks, of course.

NINE YEARS' CONSTANT READER.—All engravings by Bartolozzi are of value, but we could not say of how much, unless we knew in what condition they were. You had better have them valued by someone near at hand.

RITA.—The year of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER ends with the month of September. You would begin with the first number of October.

KUDEN.—The shillings and sixpences coined in the reign of Queen Anne are said to be worth 2s. to 3s. You do not describe it, so we cannot tell you further. If there be an "E." under the Queen's bust, it was coined in Edinburgh.

DRAGON-FLY.—In the first issue of threepenny, two-penny, and penny-pieces in Charles II.'s reign, the edges were not milled, but there is no reason given for the fact. In the reign of Elizabeth there was an issue of hammered, and one of milled, threepenny-pieces. It was probably a matter of convenience, as we can find no explanation of it.

BARGE.—1. The term "Limited," or "Ltd.," as generally written, is a legal way of announcing the way in which that business is conducted. There can be no question of politeness nor good manners about it, so you can add it to your address without interfering with either.—2. The word "thereof" is used in law works. "Therefore" means "for this (previously mentioned) reason." "Therefor" means "for this (previously mentioned) thing."

MERCIA.—The book is not of any monetary value, we regret to say.

STENCIL WARE.—The origin of the family of Este was in Italy. The first we hear of it is Alberto I., a Tuscan prince, who died about 972 A.D. They were rulers of Tuscany, Milan, Genoa, Padua, Modena, and Ferrara. The last ruler of this State, Alfonso II., died without issue, 1597, and Pope Clement VIII. seized on his estates. The descendants, however, of his brother Cesare ruled in Modena till 1801, when the male line became extinct, and it passed through the female line to Austria. The last duke, Francesco V., was driven from his dominions in 1859, and the duchy was soon afterwards incorporated into the kingdom of Italy. The House of Este was (in 1060) divided into two branches; John Guelph was invested with the Duchy of Bavaria, and Fulco remained at Modena and Ferrara.

The former is the ancestor of the House of Hanover. A WIDOW.—A widow does not change the style of her address on the death of her husband. If she were previously Mrs. John Thompson, she remains the same, and uses it on her cards and letters. Mrs. Mary Thompson is a form of address that is purely legal, and used by lawyers or other men of business. It is not used in society. The methods of addressing an aunt differ in different families. Aunt Mary, or Aunt Thompson, are both correct. The latter is, however, rather old-fashioned. We know a family in which there are three Aunt Marys. One is Aunt Mary, the second is Aunt Mary John (the name of her husband superadded), and the third is Aunt Mary Scott. These distinguishing names are only used when their owners are spoken of. When spoken to, they are all Aunt Marys.

A BEDFORDIAN.—We think your handwriting unformed, and you probably could not write quickly enough for secretarial work. Why not practise a more flowing hand?

LORNA.—It is quite correct to have cards of your own, if you be living with your brother, and keeping his house.

FLOSSIE.—Wear the white dress, if it be clean enough. Why not?