

EVERY MAN HIS OWN HOUSEKEEPER;
OR,
HOW A BACHELOR TRIED TO MANAGE FOR HIMSELF.

By JAMES AND NANETTE MASON.

CHAPTER I.



one knows, or should know, that after London, Skelterbridge is the most important, bustling, money-making city in this land of ours. If industry wants to advance with rapid strides to fortune and does not object to pursuing its career in a dull light and an atmosphere of smoke, no place—no, not even the great Metropolis itself—was ever seen to present superior opportunities and attractions. To be one of its citizens is to find a welcome everywhere, for what door does not fly open when people either have the reputation of wealth or are credited with being on the high road to possess it?

It was in this influential city that Andrew Ormond, whose adventures in doing for himself we have here to tell, bought and sold and made a comfortable income.

We have tried hard to remember the number of what was his office, because some reader of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER visiting Skelterbridge might have the curiosity to go and look at it, but it has escaped us. However, it is easily found out; it was on the south side of St. Katherine's Place in the very heart and busiest part of the city, right opposite the office of the leading newspaper and a few steps from the tramway terminus.

On entering from the street there was a notice-board to the right hand, and amongst the names of those tenancing the first floor was that of "Andrew Ormond, Merchant and Commission Agent."

It was chiefly in sugar that he dealt. All the refiners in the neighbourhood—and they are numerous—knew him well and respected him as an honest man who always asked a fair price, tried to give good value, and proved a pattern of justice when any dispute arose about the cargo not coming up to the sample.

The commission at which he used to work was small, but the transactions were large, so the pursuit of upright business ways ended in his making a considerable amount of money. By the time he was thirty-five years old, what with industry and good luck, he had managed to save enough to bring in an income of—we never knew exactly, but it was close on, and maybe a few pounds over, two hundred and fifty pounds a year.

On arriving at this point he began to think seriously about retiring from business. Some people might hold that he had far from enough—people to whom enough is just a little more than one has. But Andrew Ormond was satisfied, being of opinion that

what he had would suffice for all the simple wants that a wise man is ever likely to entertain. He had no delight in pomps and vanities—ostentation and display being quite foreign to his character—and when these are abandoned it is wonderful on how small a sum one can get along cheerfully and respectably.

Had he been a married man his wife might have raised objections, but he was a bachelor as the reader from our title knows already. It is not that there was over his life the shadow of blighted affections or anything of that sort. He had been much too busy: that was the chief secret. Everyone is aware what a heavy contribution the preliminaries of wedded life demand in time and attention from a man engaged in making his way in the world.

But besides this he had a mental twist by general consent allowed to be anti-matrimonial; he had a passion for books and a mania for accumulating a library. The apartments in which he lived for many years in the west end of Skelterbridge were crowded with books, and with one of them in his hand he mostly spent what leisure time of evenings came in his way. They were not rare or valuable books, any of them, but they were remarkably well selected so far as the reading was concerned, and when people take to investing in literature, that after all ought to be the main point.

This, then, was his other life apart from that of St. Katherine's Place. In fact he had two lives: one sugar and the other books, and the books suited his taste much better than the sugar.

It is not to be wondered at, under the circumstances, that retiring to a life of leisure had long been his castle in the air, and that at last, he having, as we have said, accumulated what he thought sufficient capital, his plans came to maturity, and he said to himself one morning as he entered the office, "From to-day I shall begin to wind up this money-making concern."

He resumed thinking about it that evening, and the first point discussed with himself was the disposal of his business. It was hardly important enough, or of a suitable character either, to convert, as is the fashion nowadays, into a limited liability company, but it struck him that he might fall in with a private purchaser to whom it might prove a tempting and profitable investment.

Now there was this that was remarkable about Andrew Ormond in those days—and we have noticed the same with one or two other fortunate folk we know—if he wanted anything it was sure to happen just as he desired. A business agency, for instance? It was offered by the next post. A customer? He met him in the street. A rise in prices? Up went the market.

Thus it fell out that on the following day when he was at the office in walked his old friend Mr. George Danby, a marine insurance broker of good standing, who had an enormous circle of acquaintances always eager to invest capital in promising ventures.

When he entered Ormond told him of his resolution.

Danby looked at him with surprise; he had little sympathy for anything, material or intellectual, outside a two-mile radius of the Skelterbridge Royal Exchange.

"Well," he said, "of all crack-brained nonsense this takes the cake. Think it over, my boy, and don't be a fool."

"Far from being a fool," said Ormond, "I hope to be numbered among the wise men. I have thought it over and my mind is quite made up."

"Impossible! Here are you with a well-established remunerative business, a favourite with almost everybody, still young, and with every prospect of piling up a considerable fortune, talking about getting out of the swim and throwing up all your chances—for what? That you may spend your days with a lot of rubbishy old volumes."

"And what," remarked Ormond, "is the use of my piling up a considerable fortune? I have no one to leave it to, and even if I had, I have seen too much of heirs squandering what their predecessors have slaved for."

"But at present," said Danby, "you have not enough, and your landlady at those fine rooms of yours has not hitherto been in the way of running the show on the lines of genteel starvation."

"I reckon on making both ends meet very well," answered Ormond. "My tastes, as you know, are all for a simple life, and what expenses are forced upon me here have never brought me a halfpenny-worth of pleasure. But I have no intention of continuing to live in Skelterbridge."

"And where, then, will you go?"

"My present plan is to look for a house in the country, ten or twelve miles away and up in the hills, if I can get it, take my books there, and exchange town life for life in a village."

"Why," said Mr. Danby, with the liberty and plain speech of a familiar friend, "that is more like a champion ass than ever! With none for company but clodhoppers and earwigs you will wish yourself a hundred times a day back to the life of Skelterbridge."

"No doubt I shall be solitary, if that's what you mean, but in private life have I not always been so? If I had sixty-three first and a hundred or so second cousins like you, it might be different. But I don't know what it is to be lonely; so it really does not matter on that account where I live."

"But what are you going to have for occupation? You can't be reading from morning till night. You will be driven, Andrew, to marry just by way of finding something to do."

"Not likely. Matrimony has no chance till I have read all my books."

"And when will that be?"

"By a moderate calculation there are enough to last for two lifetimes."

"Spite of that you will marry," said the sagacious Mr. Danby, "if you can get over one difficulty. The fact is that the books don't stand so much in the way. It is that, like me, you are afraid. We have too long watched the whimsicalities of women and the frivolities of girls, and studied too closely unfortunate and unhappy marriages—with Madame foolish, tyrannical and capricious; the husband perhaps working whilst the wife is wasting; the children certain cares and uncertain comforts. Yes, no wonder we keep as we are."

"You take too gloomy a view," observed Ormond, "but certainly I am afraid of introducing into my life one who might have the power to ruin it."

No matter what could be said, it was impossible to turn Andrew Ormond from his purpose or to convince him that the proposed change was likely to prove a mistake.

Satisfied as to this, Mr. Danby dropped the discussion and like a loyal friend said he would do what he could to further Ormond's views. "And as you really want to sell the business," he added, "I think I know the very man who will be glad to buy and pay a reasonable price."

And so it fell out that about the close of the following week a circular was issued to all interested intimating that Mr. Andrew Ormond would after a certain date transfer his business to Mr. So-and-So, who would thereafter conduct it on the lines which had

hitherto given so much satisfaction—and here followed the usual compliments and flourishes.

A month passed and then, on a May evening, Andrew Ormond wrote his last business letter, gave a parting shake of the hand to all his clerks, from the cashier to the office-boy, and made his first step into the new life which he had planned for himself.

He had many things in his favour. He was a philosopher, self-contained, and his own best company; he had a cheerful disposition,

no anxiety about money, no extravagances, no absurd expectations, and a firm belief in finding happiness by leading one's own life in one's own way.

Going west he fell in with his cousin, Kate Vincent, almost the only relative he had, and quite as outspoken a critic of his affairs as Mr. Danby. He told her that he thought he had got his life right at last.

"Well," said Kate, "we very seldom do get our lives just right, and if they are ever so it only lasts a day."

(To be continued.)

AN ENGLISH GIRL IN SOUTH AFRICA.

At the present time the sympathy and interest of every Englishwoman is stirred to the uttermost by the knowledge of all the suffering and privation that are being endured by English people in South Africa. I know how anxiously the home people watch and wait for news, how eagerly the newspapers are read, and how sadly every heart beats when the news of a dearly-bought victory is followed by the tidings of individual loss and death. I know that no English girl could read with unmoved feelings the accounts of the great and noble deeds done by our brave soldiers out here, deeds that will live in history long after the war is past.

Doubtless you have all read and heard about the Boers as men of war, and you have probably seen pictures of their towns, and the scenes of their battles; but I feel sure you will be interested in hearing about their lives in times of peace, especially if you know as little about the Free State as I did when I came out to Africa a year ago.

Let us begin with their homes. The Dutch farms are curiously unattractive, internally as well as externally. They are generally built under the shelter of a small kopje, and some

of them have the additional shelter of surrounding trees—tall blue-gums, cypresses, silver-wattles, and beautiful orange-trees—but a great many farms are singularly bare of foliage of any description, and give one the idea of having been washed up by a strange wave, and left on the veldt lonely and desolate. They are built of stone, hewn out of the nearest quarry, and mortar made of mud. Very few farms are brick, though some of the rich farmers are now building brick houses. They are all one-storeyed, and have a stoep, which is raised a couple of feet or more from the ground, built of stone, and roofed like an English verandah. Most of the rooms open on to the stoep, and some of them have no other means of entrance, so that retiring to bed on a dark evening, one has to walk cautiously for fear of snakes. Some of the stoeps have no covering, but are just bare unattractive stone platforms. The roofs everywhere are corrugated iron, and look colourless and cold. One longs for a dash of red, an irregular gable window, an old oak beam, or a thatched roof to break the monotony.

Inside the farm-house one finds the same uninteresting commonplace ornaments that one knows so well in seaside lodgings at home. Crochet antimacassars, wool mats in variegated colouring, highly-coloured

almanacs, with a grocer's or store-keeper's (as he is called in South Africa) name in the corner. Very often one finds a mud floor, and wooden chairs, the seats of which are thin strips of untanned leather stretched across. The ceilings are wooden in the bigger houses, and canvas or calico in the poorer ones. The Dutch are very fond of music, and you will always find a piano, American organ, or old-fashioned harmonium in the place of honour in the parlour. Spring-bòk skins take the place of carpets in a great many of the rooms, and the floor boards are stained, polished, and kept in very good condition. Outside are the stables, small detached stone buildings, and at a little distance the huts, where the Kafirs who work on the farm live. These huts are always built of mud, and have roofs thatched with dried rushes, and they are so low that one has to stoop considerably before creeping in at the door. They are often built in a round shape, with no windows, and a mud floor, hollowed in the centre to form a fire-place. The walls are built with niches, where the household goods are kept, big blocks of home-made soap being always conspicuous, and they are hung round with the dried skins of small wild animals. Round about are the kraals, low stone walls, within which the cattle are driven at night; and there is the orchard with its wealth of fruit trees, peach, apricot, and plum, and

just a patch of flower garden cultivated with great difficulty, on account of the drought, but repaying every little care by flowering abundantly and luxuriantly. Such a wealth of roses one never sees growing at home. The flowers run riot, as if they would say, "Take only a little trouble with us, and we will show you what South African roses can do."

To one side, a short distance from the house, and built on the most naturally adaptable bit of land, is the dam—the most important feature of a Free State farm, supplying water to the garden, the orchard, and the "lands," i.e., the cultivated part of the veldt,



MAKUNGO OR BUSHMEN'S VILLAGE.

(From a photograph for the Paris Society for Evangelical Missions.)

seldom with his neighbours, so that Janet saw but little of other children, and the chief companionship that she ever enjoyed was that of her brother during his holidays from school. The two were devoted to each other. Bertie was Janet's hero: to be like him was her greatest ambition, so that she worked hard at her studies and, as far as possible, read the same books as he did, whilst during the blissful holidays she shared with keen enjoyment all his occupations and amusements.

Years passed on, and Bertie, after his course at Oxford, passed a year at a Theological College, and was ordained to a curacy in Hampshire. But scarcely was he settled in his new home than there reached him one morning a telegram announcing the dangerous illness of his father. He arrived to find him lying unconscious, and that same night he passed away, leaving Janet and Bertie practically alone in the world.

When they came to look into his affairs, they found to their astonishment and dismay that, owing to unfortunate investments, their father had died nearly penniless, so that, instead of being left comfortably provided for as they had always expected, they were now dependent on their own energies and resources.

Janet faced the position bravely, doing her utmost to cheer Bertie, who was terribly distressed on her account and at being unable to do anything for her.

"I shall turn to and teach, of course," she said, "or go out as companion to some good, fussy old lady, who will want me to look after her cats or walk out with her poodle." And she resolutely set to work to meet with some suitable situation.

All the time she shrank very much from a life of strict routine, and from feeling herself at the disposal of another person, for though her life had been so quiet, she had been to an unusual degree her own mistress, with her time at her own disposal.

Whilst she was still searching the papers for a likely-sounding advertisement, she received one day an unexpected letter from an old friend of her father's. This Mr. Cartright had a niece out at the Cape, whose husband had a large farm at some distance up country. They were wanting an English lady to teach the children and assist Mrs. Thornton in the many

domestic works that fall to the lot of a settler's wife, and they offered a liberal salary to a suitable person. On Mr. Cartright's hearing this, he wrote immediately to Janet, asking her if she were willing to go and fill the post, offering at the same time to defray all the expenses of her journey for the sake of his old friendship with her father. Reluctant as she felt to go so far from Bertie, they both felt that such a generous offer must not be lightly rejected, and after carefully weighing the *pros* and *cons* of the plan, it was finally decided that Janet should sail for the Cape on the 19th of March, and in spite of her dread of the parting before her, the new prospect had after all something particularly alluring to the girl. After her somewhat monotonous life spent chiefly in one place, there was great charm in the thought that at last she would see something of the great world, familiar to her hitherto only through her books.

But as the time drew near and she had to bid farewell to the old home and the villagers whom she had known from childhood, sorrow naturally predominated, so that when the day for sailing had actually arrived and Bertie took her down to Southampton, she had to summon all her fortitude to her aid to keep her brother from seeing how much the parting and the lonely start were costing her.

She had had an introduction to a Miss Codrington and her brother, who were returning to Kimberley, and she scanned the faces of those nearest her, wondering what her new acquaintances would be like. For although her home life had trained her in habits of self-reliance, yet she was naturally shy and retiring, and shrank from the thought of being left to begin the long voyage amongst so many people absolutely unknown to her.

They were soon on board the great steamer *Peruvian*, which looked magnificent in her fresh paint, ready for her maiden voyage. All were loud in their praise of her arrangements and accommodation. Everything was still in the confusion usual on such occasions, and everybody in a state of excitement. Luncheon was going on in the large and highly-decorated saloon; some of the passengers were inquiring for farewell letters and telegrams, whilst others inspected the capabilities of their cabins, or explored the vessel with their friends. Bertie was anxious to see the Captain and

make his acquaintance before leaving Janet, so they descended the companion leading to the saloon, where the introduction duly took place. Captain Sharp promised to do his best to make things comfortable for her. "She will have no lack of companions at any rate," he added, "I have never carried out such a number before, and the ship is a rare good one."

As they turned away, a young man and a girl rose from the luncheon table close by, and as they passed by them, the man, who was young and somewhat good-looking, gave Janet a glance half admiration, half questioning, and said something to his companion in a low voice, to which she merely shrugged her shoulders in response.

After Janet had seen her own quarters and stowed away her possessions, the bell rang to warn the passengers' friends that in a few minutes they must be ready to leave the ship. They prepared to go on deck, and Bertie proposed that they should make inquiries for Mr. and Miss Codrington that he might form some idea as to what sort of companions they would prove for Janet; but seeing no one at once who tallied with the description given them, his sister declared that she would waste no more of their last moments together. These soon came to an end: the last bell rang; the last farewells were spoken, and then, punctual as a mail train, the great steamer made her start. Janet stood leaning over the bulwarks, her eyes fixed on Bertie's figure as long as she could make it out, her hands tightly clenched, in her fixed determination not to give way in public. She remained in that attitude for some minutes, apparently lost in thought, and when she at length turned to look about her, she found many people had already disappeared and the deck in her immediate vicinity was tolerably clear. She was just wondering what next she should do, when she perceived the young man whom she had remarked in the saloon standing at a little distance and gazing at her with the same peculiar, scarcely disguised look of admiration on his face. Janet flushed slightly and was about to cross the deck, intending to go below, when he stepped hastily forward, raising his hat as he said—

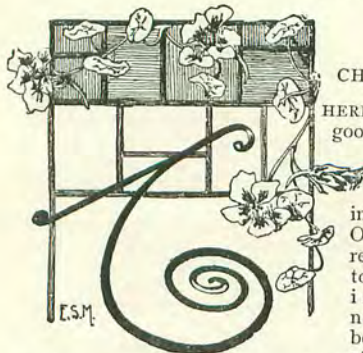
"Miss Esdaile, I believe?"
(*To be continued.*)

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CHAP. II.

HERE was a good deal of common sense in Andrew Ormond's resolution to settle in the neighbourhood of Skelter-

bridge. The place in which he chose to establish himself was Heckencrow, a village a little farther away than the ten or twelve miles he had spoken of originally. It was about twenty-five miles off, lying high up on the borders of a breezy moorland that stretched away to a range of hills of rugged and picturesque outline.

To reach it was comparatively easy. There was a little roadside station about two miles off, and the walk from thence, all uphill, to Heckencrow was so interesting because of its occasional wooding and glimpses of distant country that, except in the dark and to very tired travellers, it seemed but a step.

On reaching the village you found the houses built all on a slope, and in the shape of a triangle round a village green of considerable size. At the higher end—the apex of the triangle—there were the remains of an old castle with the date 1272 cut on a stone over the ruined gateway.

But the old baronial doings had given place here as elsewhere to modern industry. Heckencrow occupied itself with weaving, not indeed on an extensive scale, but it was quite enough to find employment for many willing hands. The mills stood at the lower end, the whole of the village lying between them and the old castle.

Such was Heckencrow—clean, neat, respectable, industrious, breezy, and sufficiently primitive for a man to go round and waken the inhabitants at six in the morning by blowing a horn—when Andrew Ormond there took up his residence.

Why, as he knew nobody there, he should have selected Heckencrow, was a puzzle to his friends. In some things we are like leaves blown about by the wind, and the wind might have been thought accidentally to have landed Andrew in that corner. But the fact is, a convenient house at Heckencrow offered itself, the scenery pleased him, and he made

bridge. Of all cities in the world Skelterbridge is the one best situated for getting quickly, cheaply and easily into pure air and beautiful scenery. Its mud and chemical fumes may well be forgiven when one thinks of the charms of nature to which the citizens have such easy access.

sure the place was healthy. These points settled, he never heard of his troubling to make further inquiry.

The house of which he became a tenant was situated at the upper end of the village, so close beside the ruined castle that the north wall of the castle bounded his garden on the south. It was a small house, but what single man, even with a cargo of books, needs a house of anything more than modest dimensions? The garden was more imposing than the house; it covered nearly an acre.

Having secured the house, Ormond's first business was to furnish it. Living up to this time in furnished apartments, he had no belongings that made any display except books and bookcases; but a bachelor, he found, can furnish a house very well if he only goes with money enough in his pocket to a respectable tradesman and says, "Do it for me—there are so many rooms, and I have so much to spend." Of course, the result does not represent his own taste—but in some cases that is just as well. It is extravagant too, for even the most respectable tradesman will insist on sending things perfectly unnecessary, and that in the long run turn out far more plague than profit.

The furnishing over, Ormond began planning his occupations—a course of reading, some literary work that he thought he could do, and he was by no means ambitious, and a series of improvements he meant to superintend in the garden. He knew well enough that he would be miserable as an idler, so he mapped out quite a career of diligence, of which it is not necessary that we should say anything here, for our business is to tell about his housekeeping and not about his studies and outdoor employments.

Behold him then, furnishing finished, and occupation planned exactly to his mind.

But furnishing, as he understood it, was easy, and finding occupation too was easy, compared with the problem that presented itself as soon as he cut his connection with comfortable city apartments, under the watchful eye of a knowing landlady. The problem was that of domestic service.

At first he thought of having a working housekeeper, but here came in the objection that in his quiet way of living there would not be work for anyone during more than a portion of each day. What then would become of the housekeeper during her hours of leisure? She would either get into mischief, or yawn her head off. It was next suggested to him that the housekeeper would be lonely, and that she ought to have a girl under her for company. A sufficient answer to this was that if there was not enough work for one, there would be still less for two. Indeed he was not sure but that the work would be better done with one than with two, as the two would encourage each other to idleness, in the spirit of the office-rule of boy which begins, "A boy is a boy: two boys is half a boy."

This would never suit. Andrew Ormond had no objections to giving good wages, but he had retained the mercantile instinct for getting a reasonable pennyworth for his penny. No idling for him.

The working housekeeper idea was therefore abandoned, and he resolved to have someone in for half of every day only, coming early in the morning and leaving after he had an early dinner, but to return in the evening if he had company. The rest of the time he could—being a handy man, or at any rate thinking himself such—manage for himself.

So he made inquiry about a suitable person. She must not be too young, and must not be too old; she must be this, and she must be that. But he soon found he must take what he could get.

Domestic service was not popular at Heckencrow. There was a considerable demand for

labour through the weaving industry we have mentioned, and the womenfolk of all ages were in consequence animated by a spirit of independence that took ill with washing other people's dishes and cooking other people's mutton chops.

At last, however, he did discover a girl, rather young perhaps, but he thought she would do. Agnes was willing enough, and had been sufficiently well instructed at home to keep a house fairly tidy and prepare meals in a plain way, but her temper was against her.

One might have excused her putting on airs on account of her having a Grecian nose and a nice complexion, but her sulky temper no one could put up with for long. Bright, cheerful, and obliging on Monday, she would come on Tuesday, for no discoverable reason, black in her looks, and short in her answers. Wednesday to Friday might be like Monday, but Saturday—you should have seen her on Saturday! Perhaps because she had extra work to do at home, on that day she was always at her worst and sulkiest.

Mr. Ormond put up with her for three months or so, not wishing to be harsh and to give her notice on account of a peculiarity that, if disagreeable to come in contact with, did not prevent her from scrubbing the floor or dusting the mantelpiece, but at last, to his relief, she told him she had obtained a situation in a draper's shop somewhere—we forget where—and off she went.

Her successor—strongly recommended by the outgoing Agnes—did not stay long. Unfortunately the truth does not seem to have been impressed on her mind that "He that takes what isn't his, is pretty sure to land in prison." Ormond's suspicions were somehow aroused, and on her ninth afternoon he called her back as she was retiring through the kitchen garden, and found that, without saying "By your leave," she was carrying off to her parental home five eggs, a packet of corn-flour, a cake of brown Windsor soap, quarter of a pound of butter, a little tea, a nicely bound copy of *The Lady of the Lake*, and three candles.

She confessed her fault and begged leave to come again next day, but her eloquence struck her master as a little insincere, and it was always Mr. Ormond's way that once he discovered people were trying to take him in, they never got the chance of doing it twice. *Exit*, then, domestic help number two.

The third was a girl who brought penny novelettes to read when she should have been at work, and she got her leave when one forenoon Mr. Ormond found her—with all about her at sixes and sevens—perched on the kitchen dresser deep in the doleful tragedy of the "Love-trials of Belinda." But it was not the confusion or the story-book either that prejudiced him against Matilda, so much as the fact that in questioning her he found that such reading had completely turned her little head. She more than hinted that her own life was as great a romance as ever was printed, that her reputed father and mother were not her real parents, and that as to her actual origin—"money in it and title too," she said—no one as yet was quite accurately informed.

The prospect of having perhaps a Royal Highness walking into his kitchen to recover a lost child was too much for our friend, so he manufactured an excuse, and number three had to go. Two more girls followed in rapid succession, the first of whom knew nothing, and was too grand to be taught, whilst the second knew nothing and was too stupid to learn. The first was dressy and consequential, and the other such a thick-head that her stupidities, if told, would hardly be believed.

Andrew Ormond began to wonder if fortune had deserted him. He was getting about tired of playing the part of mistress to such maids.

Just then he heard of a young woman who, like a good daughter, had given up a situation

in Skelterbridge that she might return to live with her mother who was growing old. She was free to take up anything requiring only a portion of her time, and some of Ormond's neighbours, interested in his housekeeping struggles, suggested that she was just cut out for looking after things for him.

Eliza came, and Mr. Ormond was not long in seeing that he had secured a treasure. Everything went as if by clockwork and was done to the minute, and as for things being in order, from the day of her entering he enjoyed the well-kept house that gives a feeling of self-respect worth living for. Her only weak point he found was that she had an exaggerated idea of the capacity of the average man as an eating machine, and would insist on providing more generous and elaborate repasts—banquets we might call them—than he had any taste for.

Her reign was such a success that he was encouraged to ask his city friends to come at intervals to pass the day, a proceeding he seldom had the heart for whilst Eliza's predecessors managed the establishment.

Danby came, Kate Vincent and her husband came, and a host of others, and the phrase with them all was, "Why, your house is as clean and bright as a new pin."

On one of these occasions he reminded Danby of the marriage question they had discussed together. "Many a man, no doubt," he said, "is driven to marry and to face all the problems of matrimonial life because he must have someone to look after his dinner. You see how well I do without."

"Yes," replied Danby, "I see. But are you sure it is going to last?"

He laughed it off at the time, but did not feel much like laughing when next morning, after clearing away the breakfast things, Eliza said to him—

"Please, sir, I must give you notice that I shall go this day month."

"What!" exclaimed Ormond, astonished. "Nothing happened, surely?"

"Why, sir, I am going to be married!"

It was to a young farmer—"a wise young farmer," Mr. Ormond often said to himself, but publicly he was quite as often heard to declare that girls in good situations don't know when they are well off.

When Eliza left him at the end of the month, the spirit seemed for the moment taken out of his housekeeping experiment. There were eleven applications for the vacant post, for though domestic service, as we have said, was not run after in Heckencrow, Mr. Ormond had by this time got a fair reputation—"a good master," they said, "but a little fussy, with too many rules for things and always referring to his everlasting domestic economy books."

He put off all the eleven and became dexterous in making excuses. He did not tell them so, but Eliza had spoiled him for all the rest. Everyone had a fault either personal or belonging to her connections.

At last, as he sat one evening two or three days after she had left, meditating on the apparent impossibility of falling in with a second Eliza, the thought struck him—

"What a poor dependent creature a man is, tied for ever to a woman's tail! And in this progressive age too, when women are doing their best to encroach on the province of man. It is absurd: beyond all question absurd. As if a man could not do for himself in ten minutes what a woman fusses around for hours—and do it better.

"I shall give up Eliza-hunting and run the show henceforth by myself and for myself. I have surely leisure enough. And, what is more, of my experience: I shall make a book, to be of use to all similarly situated, and the title of the book will be—

"*The New Man; or, Woman Entirely Dispensed With.*"

(To be continued.)

THE SONG OF THE CITY.

In the deepest glade of a forest,
By the bank of a gliding stream,
Sat a weary and footsore pilgrim
Who was lost in a hopeless dream.

He had left the city behind him,
And had wandered far alone
In the hope of joys in the future
Which his past had never known.

For the endless charm of the city
Is its wondrous gift of song,
Which is deadly mute to the friendless
As they pass through the merry throng.

Then he lifted his eyes from the water,
And he turned an eager ear
To a voice that seemed to be whispering
In the leafy branches near.

Have you thought of God and His purpose
When He called the light of day
From the void of chaos and darkness,
Where the world in silence lay?

Do you know that life has a meaning
You can read if you only will—
That it tells of grief that is over,
And of love that conquers ill?

Did your mother teach you no lesson
That is with you still to-day,
When, forgetting her sorrow and anguish,
She would smile and watch your play?

Do not rest in lonely dejection,
But arise in the strength of man,
Who can read in the works of his Father
What is meant by love's great plan.

If you seek the welfare of others,
You will share their glad relief
When the joy that comes in the morning
Has effaced the night of grief."

Then he bowed his head for a moment,
And he thought, as on he trod,
Of the changeless heart of a mother
And the boundless love of God.

And he works with God where his brothers
With their trials and troubles throng,
And the endless charm of the city
Is its wondrous gift of song.

H. C. A.



EVERY MAN HIS OWN HOUSEKEEPER ;

OR,

HOW A BACHELOR TRIED TO MANAGE FOR HIMSELF.

BY JAMES AND NANETTE MASON.

CHAPTER III.

THERE were several things in his favour when Andrew Ormond started on the experiment of being his own housekeeper.

In the first place Eliza had left Castle Cottage, as his place was called, as neat as possible; not a speck of dust, even in the most obscure corner, and every shining surface as highly polished as elbow-grease could make it. For some months, at any rate, neglect was not likely to make itself conspicuous.

The villagers, too, were all friendly and obliging, and his striking out in a line of his own did not draw disparaging criticism from them as it might have done had they been society folk. No doubt they had occasional laughs when they heard incidents of his inexperience, but the laughing was done pleasantly, for the Heckencrowers were a good-natured race on the whole. One can put up with supplying amusement if one gets help, and of that—real neighbourly help—Ormond, from time to time, received a great deal.

The life he planned for himself might have had a depressing influence on some, because of its loneliness, but he seemed cut out for it. Solitude did not send him to sleep. He even discovered a mild form of excitement in cooking his own meals, warring against dust and disorder, and investigating the virtues of soap and water.

Even had it been unpalatable, he would have cheerfully put up with it, for was it not thus that he was to gain knowledge that would make him a benefactor to all lords of creation

similarly placed. So he said to himself as he sat down at his desk on the forenoon after the resolution recorded in our last chapter, and wrote the title-page of what were to be his valuable experiences—*The New Man ; or, Woman Entirely Dispensed With.*

Having sufficient means, his house was furnished with every requisite for doing the experiment justice. A well-provided house it certainly was; blacklead in it enough to last for seven years, and other things in proportion. What he had not and really wanted he bought: what he had not and merely imagined he wanted he bought likewise. Imagination was indeed far more active than necessity.

We two who write this remember meeting him one day going in haste to catch the train for Skelterbridge, his object being there to buy two flat-irons. He had discovered a dreadful thing; Castle Cottage was without flat-irons, and a house without flat-irons seemed a house disgraced. However, once he got them we never heard that they were turned by him to the slightest use.

He invested largely in labour-saving apparatus—potato-paring machines, knife-cleaning machines, patent egg-whisks, mincing-machines, cinder-sifters, carpet-sweepers, and suchlike—all very well for a considerable establishment, but for a household that came all under one hat, such purchases were little more than waste of money.

If buying necessary and unnecessary articles could have done it, or if accumulating cookery-books and domestic-management books by the shelfful could have done it, then Ormond's housekeeping would have been a great success.

But it must be confessed—as will be readily believed by practical people—that on calling at Castle Cottage in those days you always had the sensation of a want somewhere. From a beginner, however, much was not to be expected, for everyone has to learn his trade.

The greatest difficulty he had to encounter was in connection with eating and drinking. One can, at a pinch, get on with a house and its furniture at sixes and sevens, but the philosopher is right who says that it is impossible to have success in life without being a good animal, and to being a good animal wise feeding is essential. This was a leading item in Ormond's own domestic faith. "Even a man's opinions," we have heard him say, "are influenced by his diet. If some people would eat more digestible food, they would think more charitable thoughts."

But theory and practice are two things. The more interested he got in books and intellectual occupations—and in these he gradually became immersed—the less he felt inclined to spend his time over pots, pans, and kettles. It seemed so absurd to have to suspend the study of the history of fiction, or of international law, or of the origin of volcanoes—for his studies had a wide range—in order that he might calculate how long should be given to the cooking of a bit of mutton, or discover whether this or that should be put first in hot water or cold. He came at last to envy the thrushes, who eat their snails raw. Nice and nourishing meals he certainly wanted, but having to prepare them was a vexation.

A cook, he found, must be a sort of watchdog with an eye ever on the oven or pot, and

have no interesting book on hand to divert attention from his proper business. Things with him were either too much done or too little; most often too much, meat being baked to a cinder, and fish boiled to rags. Once in a while it was done just right, but then it was purely by accident.

We never found out how many kettles he ruined by leaving them on the fire to boil themselves empty, but we know that at Castle Cottage there was a considerable incurable hospital of cooking utensils, which, but for his neglect, might have had a long life of usefulness. It made a careful housekeeper's heart woeful to see them.

Plain cooking, very plain cooking, suited him best. Ormond made out that it was best for health, but it was really its simplicity that attracted him. However, it undoubtedly was healthy. Many dishes, and elaborate dishes, are responsible for many diseases. The awkward thing was that on some days he had hardly enough to eat. There was in his house either abundance or semi-starvation; one day it would be a feast and another a fast, for he never wholly mastered the art of marketing so as to have always enough and without any waste.

We said that his model girl Eliza, when she abandoned Castle Cottage in favour of matrimony, had left the house bright and shining. After a time there was a change. The house grew dusty; dustier and more untidy every day. It seemed at last as if dust—the plague of the house as weeds are the plague of the garden—was going to be master of the situation. There were cobwebs, too, visible if you cast your eyes on the ceiling or into corners. Ormond used to excuse them on the ground that it was not lucky to kill spiders. "If you wish to live and thrive, let the spider run alive"—a fine proverb for lazy and incompetent housekeepers.

He took fits and starts of industry, laying down rules for himself to be a daily enemy to dust and disorder, but the difficulty, for one untrained to housework and interested in other things, was to observe them. True, there was a memorable period when he had everything nearly as well looked to as if there had been a "missus" on the premises. It was after a sudden thought had struck him:—"Suppose I met with an accident when rambling over the moor and were picked up and carried home, I should not like those who carried me to see how the house was all in confusion." But it did not last. In two or three weeks dust and disorder reigned as before. He kept saying to himself, "I shall do better to-morrow," but when to-morrow came it was just like to-day.

In the end he grew indifferent. People must take me as they find me, came to be his heroic resolution, and when that was arrived at we thought he positively gloried in the company of his cobwebs.

Before this, however, he had lightened his labours considerably. His house up to the time of Eliza's leaving had been something of a show, ornaments and curiosities lying about in great profusion on the ledges of bookcases, on mantelpieces, on brackets, in fact everywhere. These added to the interest of Castle Cottage, but greatly also to the trouble of keeping it clean. To Ormond, with duster in hand, they were only a trouble, so he resolved to pack them all away. And this he did, to the number of two hundred and thirty-seven, in three great boxes, wrapping them all in paper—vases, fans, statuettes, clocks, shells, mirrors, Japanese trays, models of Cornish wayside crosses, old swords and pistols, and suchlike. It was a great relief when they were thus disposed of, but was it encouraging for a man trying to be his own housekeeper to think that he was not equal to the management of a few nicknacks?

In the face, and perhaps in consequence, of his experiences, Andrew Ormond went on

bravely with the manuscript of *The New Man*, by which he was going to benefit the world of bachelors and emancipate them from dependence on women. If he made mistakes in his own person, so much the better; he would be all the more a shining beacon light for the guidance of others.

There was no attempt in the portion which he once lent to us to conceal the fact that he was not a success at first, but hopes were evidently entertained that in the end all that would be altered. Just as much, he argued, as woman is fitted for entering on the sphere of man, so is man cut out for distinction in the sphere of woman. Having been kept out of household industry for so many generations, he had lost adaptability, but he would be restored to his rights and have opportunities for exercising them on the publication of *The New Man* and the breaking down thereby of woman's monopoly.

When faculties long disused were again in operation, man, Ormond pointed out, would never be found making household mistakes as he himself had done. For example, he would have a place for everything and everything in its place; he would never invert the order of things and dust before sweeping or sweep before laying the fire; he would never leave things on the floor or on the stairs to be tripped over; he would never allow bread to lie about to attract mice; he would never give so much as a chance to moths; he would keep everything ready for use and not have to clean pots and pans at the last minute; he would never fill the filter over-night and leave the tap open, so that when he came downstairs in the morning it would be to find three gallons of filtered water all over the floor; he would try always to be well, and if once in a while he did feel a little bit poorly, he would sit by the fire and go early to bed, thankful to get better without any fuss being made over him.

A year passed—two years—three years, and Ormond went on making his mistakes, accumulating experiences and wasting time as some people said. But there were a few things, it must be allowed, in his way of living that were to his advantage.

It had a favourable influence on his character. He grew very independent, ready to do anything without fear of observation and without regard to criticism. What people said no longer influenced him. "What say they? Let them say."

Some of his friends, Mr. George Danby and others, tried to convince him that the course he pursued was not dignified, in fact a trifle degrading, and that housework should be left to womenfolk.

His answer satisfied at least himself. "A great number of our ideas," he told them, "are purely conventional, and the wise and only free man is he who makes himself independent of conventionality. Housework is as little undignified or degrading for me as it is for womenfolk. They are as good as I, and I ought to be willing to do myself whatever I would ask them to do!"

"Why," he would add, "if I wash my own face, should I not black my own grate and sweep my own floor?" and then he would quote with approval the example of Brahms, the great composer, who says, "The best songs come into my head whilst brushing my shoes before break of day."

Not only did he become independent in his ways, he grew to be more and more tolerant of the ways of other people. Criticism, he saw, is often mere groping in the dark. Our neighbours know why they live as they do and we don't, and the best and kindest thing is to allow them to develop themselves in their own fashion.

Sympathy for women, too, increased as he gained acquaintance with the work in which so much of their lives is spent. It was clear to

us who watched him that if ever he did marry he would prove a reasonable husband, never expecting the impossible and, because he understood them, doing all he could to lighten his partner's household cares.

And this leads us to tell that he was, naturally enough, a subject of interest to the ladies, especially the unmarried ones, in the neighbourhood of Heckencrow. They predicted—what did they not predict? One point they were unanimous upon: bachelorhood, as he understood it, was doomed to failure, and some cherished hopes that he would rub his eyes at last and discover their own particular merits as housekeepers.

There was one in particular, a Miss Euphemia Leslie, who, in company with her father and mother, used sometimes to visit Castle Cottage, and on those occasions she would discourse learnedly on the difficulties of this and that and condescend to tell Ormond exactly how things should be done. It was highly impressive. No one could help seeing what an advantage in the management of a house a knowing woman had over a stupid bachelor.

On this account Ormond felt attracted towards Euphemia. But the attraction did not last long. It was not a passion but only a calculation. Apart from housekeeping characteristics she was particularly uninteresting—hard, Philistine, almost vulgar—and likely to prove no better than a lump of lead to any one who ventured on uniting her destiny with his own. "If the chief end of man," said Ormond to himself after he had studied her for a while, "is to eat a good dinner, she is the very wife for me, but if I am to have the good humour which alone makes possible the digestion of a good dinner, then the less I think about her the better." And with that he dismissed her from his mind.

It came at last to be generally recognised that he was not of a marrying sort, and only Miss Euphemia—so far as we could observe—kept alive in her heart the flame of hope for such a comfortable "down-sitting."

The saying then went round the village that our friend was a woman-hater, but one does not need to live long in a country place to discover that people will say anything, and that what is uttered at first in jest gets repeated and goes the rounds in earnest, and with more or less of picturesque additions. Woman-hater and hermit of Heckencrow they called him, but never was a man less deserving of either title than he.

The most useful criticism of his housekeeping came from his cousin, Kate Vincent, who had a character like a tonic mixture. She occasionally came out from Skelterbridge on Saturday afternoons with her husband, of whom, however, nothing is to be said; he was a mild, silent man, whose existence one hardly suspected when his wife was near.

The dust in Ormond's house, the untidiness, the general air of give-me-a-helping-hand-please distressed Kate. As a result he had to listen to sage counsel. She was by no means well disposed to Euphemia, whom she knew, but like Danby she advised Ormond that marriage was the only likely solution of his problem.

"No," said he, "it would be no solution. The problem would only then be just at the beginning. I can't afford it."

"Why," replied Kate, "you have exaggerated views as to the expense. The waste in your house would keep a wife."

Ormond then shifted his ground and quoted a proverb to the effect that "he who would avoid all strife should be a bachelor. No doubt I don't do things right," he added, "but I shall improve. I want to be the handy man about the house."

"What you want," answered Kate, "is the handy woman about the house."

(To be concluded.)

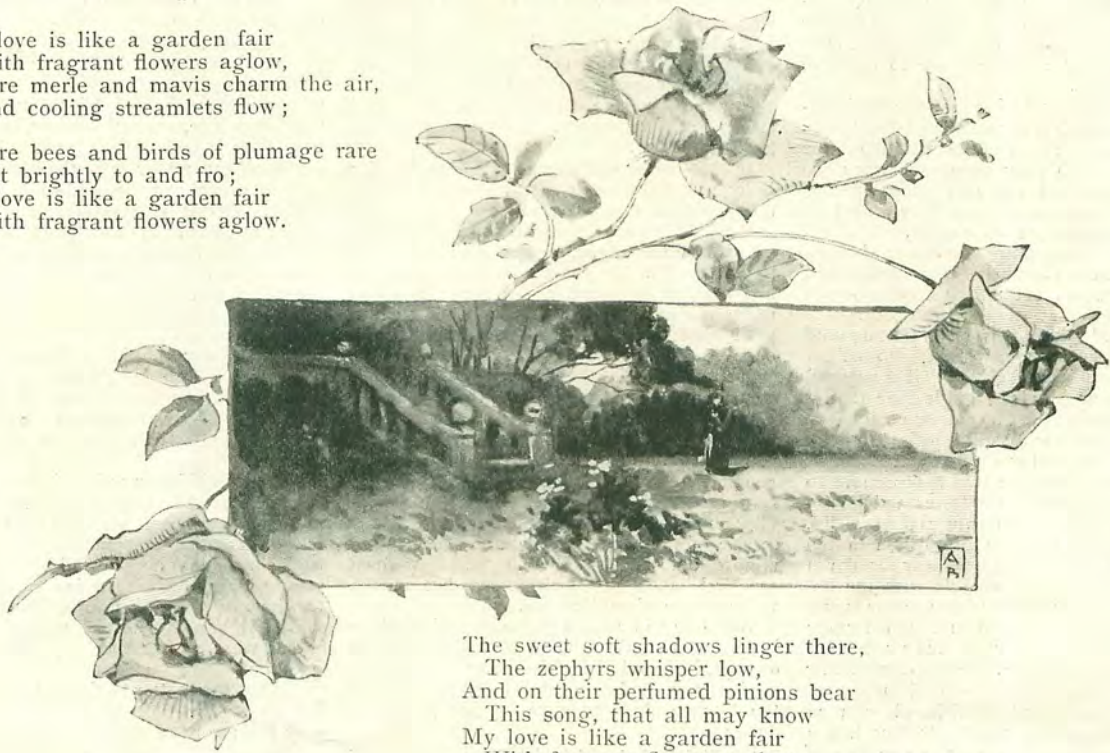
MY LOVE IS LIKE A GARDEN FAIR.

RONDEL.

By G. D. LYNCH.

My love is like a garden fair
 With fragrant flowers aglow,
 Where merle and mavis charm the air,
 And cooling streamlets flow ;

Where bees and birds of plumage rare
 Flit brightly to and fro ;
 My love is like a garden fair
 With fragrant flowers aglow.



The sweet soft shadows linger there,
 The zephyrs whisper low,
 And on their perfumed pinions bear
 This song, that all may know
 My love is like a garden fair
 With fragrant flowers aglow.

EVERY MAN HIS OWN HOUSEKEEPER ;

OR,

HOW A BACHELOR TRIED TO MANAGE FOR HIMSELF.

By JAMES AND NANETTE MASON.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE evening, when his house was about at its dustiest, and his mind, it must be confessed, was uneasy as to whether he had not mistaken his vocation, Andrew Ormond went to a village concert.

They had a series of such entertainments every winter, for Heckencrow was a musical place—at least, that is what it thought itself.

We two happened to be at the concert also, and sat immediately behind Ormond ; he was in the second row from the front, we remember.

It was not an extraordinary concert by any means. For a start there was a cantata sung by the Heckencrow Choral Society, and this was followed by a miscellaneous section, in which many of the notable musicians of the village took part. There was the little school-missus, with a voice as small and sweet as herself ; the local tenor, with his affectations ; the pianist, with the wonderful feathers in her hat, and her thumps and bangs ; the baritone comic vocalist, playing with great applause the part of Tom Fool ; the violin-solo performer, with her supercilious smile and calm self-possessed face ; and, last of all—

Yes, last of all—and she deserves a paragraph to herself—at the very end of the programme, and immediately before the audience rose to their feet for “ God save the

Queen,” a young lady mounted the platform. She was a stranger to most who were there, for she had only recently come to reside in the neighbourhood, but her look of intelligence, enthusiasm, and good humour seemed to make everyone at once feel friendly.

She was received with applause, and the demonstrations of approval when she had finished her song were as great as those called forth by the comic vocalist, which, considering that it was a village concert, is saying a good deal.

“ Who is that ? ” asked Ormond, turning round to us. “ The best kept to the last.”

We told him, during the unsuccessful attempt to get the song repeated, that she was a Miss Alice Chapman whom we knew very well, whose widowed mother had taken a house—and a nice house it was too—about a mile out of Heckencrow, with the intention of being a permanent resident.

“ Good voice—good style—good looks,” remarked our friend in the tone of a man who had made up his mind.

Then up got everybody ; a verse of the National Anthem was sung, and we all dispersed. Andrew Ormond’s way lay up the hill, ours lay down, so we saw no more of him that night.

He walked home thinking about the entertainment, or rather about the songstress who had attracted his notice. He continued thinking of her as he lit his lamp and poked

up his half-extinguished fire, as he boiled the kettle and ate his solitary supper.

“ Is she what I think she is, or is what I think only the creature of my imagination ? ” said he to himself as he settled down with a book in hand and his feet on the fender, and this, seeing he had only seen her for the first time an hour before, will strike everyone as having been a prudent reflection.

On the following morning, being winter-time, he rose late, much later than an industrious housekeeper should. In consequence he was “ all behind ” in the forenoon, and when at last he sat down to his desk, the putting of the house straight was almost all yet to be done.

“ It’s all one,” thought he, looking from the window on the dreary weather outside. “ No one will come to-day.”

But, sure enough, it was just the day on which the Princess came.

And this is how that happened :—

We two, walking home the previous night, had said one to the other that it would be a friendly thing to introduce Mrs. and Miss Chapman to Mr. Ormond. We had not a thought of match-making ; no, it never entered our heads, which all who know us will readily believe. It only struck us that educated, interesting people resident in the same neighbourhood reap a mutual benefit by knowing each other.

There is no time like the present, so on the following afternoon we called on the ladies, and finding the introduction would be agreeable to them, and knowing well enough that it would be pleasing to Mr. Ormond, we took them with us to Castle Cottage.

Nothing could have turned out better. The weather, the health of the village, the muddy roads, the first snowdrops in the garden, were soon passed over and we came to items of personal interest.

Given the right sort of people, the establishment of friendship is one of the easiest things in the world, and that was the reflection in the minds of us two poor innocents when we heard Ormond and the two ladies parting with mutual assurances that they would be very glad to meet each other again.

When we were walking afterwards through the village, Mrs. Chapman, who always had her eyes open, and had noticed how Ormond's house looked as if it would be the better of a "redding up," said, "It is clear that he does not keep Castle Cottage as it ought to be."

"True," said her daughter; "it is not well done, but the wonder is to find it done at all."

Intimacy having thus begun, one called led to another, and another to still another, until at last Andrew Ormond was a frequent visitor at the Chapmans', and the two ladies came to know even more about his tastes and house-keeping difficulties and adventures than we did.

Alice, who had the best disposition in the world, felt a good deal of sympathy for him in what she thought his struggle with the impossible, but the main attraction perhaps was his love of literature, which met with a ready response from the intellectual hunger existing in her own mind. Her mother also took kindly to him; she was less pronounced in manner than Alice, quiet and gentle, and with an air of the West End about her that had a certain charm for refined natures like that of Ormond.

By the time winter and spring were over, and early summer in all its beauty was showing itself in Heckencrow, our friend stood with the Chapmans on the footing of a familiar friend. We noticed too that his housekeeping had considerably improved. Things were not as dusty as they used to be, and there was an air of comparative neatness and brightness about his surroundings that looked just as if he were desirous of pleasing somebody's eye.

In the beginning of June it happened that Alice wished to make a sketch of the old castle, the north wall of which, we have mentioned, formed the southern boundary to the garden of Castle Cottage. The light for her purpose was best a little before dinner-time, and thus it fell out that Andrew Ormond was bold enough to ask her and her mother to take their evening meal with him.

It did not matter, did it, that they should make themselves quite at home at his house? Alice promised she would help in getting dinner ready—if he gave leave, be it understood—but Ormond declared that though making no pretensions to being either an Ude, Carême, Soyer, or Francatelli, he thought he could manage very well by himself. He would be the culinary artist, and the waiting at table would be done by a little girl, the daughter of one of the villagers.

It was to be a plain repast—lamb and mint sauce, new potatoes and broccoli, gooseberry tart and Devonshire junket. Nothing could be simpler. And the cooking was to be done with a new mineral oil stove in which Ormond had invested—such a treasure! It saved no end of trouble compared with a coal fire, especially in summer time, and could perform at least half-a-dozen cooking operations at once, could in fact turn out a good dinner with a surprisingly small expenditure of trouble. At least, that is what the advertisements said.

The day came, and with it came Mrs. and

Miss Chapman. Ormond had the dinner-table laid as nice as a picture, and after his guests had paid him a compliment on that subject, they went to the top of the garden, where, beside a moss-grown bank and under a high hedge Alice proceeded with her sketch.

But before they went out of doors Ormond, who expected the arrival of the little girl, Polly McArthur, every minute, went into the kitchen and left this note in large letters on the dresser where she would be sure to see it:

"Polly, be sure to baste the meat and attend to the vegetables. And don't forget to look to the tart."

In this way he made sure as he thought—for Polly was a knowing character—that everything would be done to a turn.

Whilst Alice was busy with her sketching, he entertained her mother by giving an account of the old castle. It was a subject to which he had devoted attention, and it never failed to rouse his antiquarian enthusiasm to such a pitch that there was hardly any stopping him once he got fairly embarked on it.

He began with the first Baron Winwood, who built the castle in the year in which Edward I. of England came to the throne, and then, with his vivid imagination, proceeded to people the old building with generation after generation of Winwoods—a cantankerous family enough, always at loggerheads with their neighbours, many of them eminent in the service of the State, but not a few held in the utmost detestation not only on their own ancestral lands at Heckencrow, but in the wider sphere of political life.

When he had arrived at the execution of the last of the race for taking part in the rebellion of 1745, he heard Polly McArthur opening the garden gate, and noticed her going round to the kitchen door to take up her important duties.

It never struck him that she was much later than he expected. How should it? He had the headsmen's axe, as it were, in hand, about to deliver the fatal blow, and at such a moment what were roast lamb, new potatoes, and gooseberry tarts to him?

The Jacobite head rolled in the sawdust, and at that instant Polly came running up the hill, and all she had breath left to say was—

"Oh, sir, the stove do smoke very bad."

"I'll tell you when I come back how the castle was dismantled," said Ormond, and off he went with rapid strides.

Sure enough the stove could hardly have smoked worse. The wicks had been turned up too high and there being no one in attendance, the first error had been uncorrected, and bad had grown to worse, till never was seen such smoke in a house before. It would have passed for a sample of a London fog—a total eclipse in the kitchen and a partial eclipse in the hall and dining-room, for the door had unfortunately been left open.

Blacks were everywhere. The snow-white linen was spotted with them, there were blacks on the bread, blacks in the salad-bowl, blacks in the Devonshire junket, blacks in the cream. What looked so bright, inviting and appetising a little time ago was now all sooty and spoiled.

What a blessing it is to be a philosopher! Ormond took in the situation at a glance and had for his first thought an inclination to give Polly a scolding for coming late, but his second thought was that it was as much his fault as hers, so all he did say was only, "Polly, like a good girl, turn out the stove and open the windows."

Then he returned to the top of the garden, vexed and annoyed, no doubt, but without the air of his plumage having been ruffled in the slightest. Instead, however, of resuming his narrative at the dismantling of the old castle, he told his friends what had happened.

"What shall we do?" said he.

"Why," said Alice, who, together with her

mother, had been laughing heartily at his description of the smoke, "the nicest thing we can do is to have dinner out on the lawn. What an evening for it, too! Just you go on telling mother about the castle and let me help Polly."

It was said on the spur of the moment. On the spur of the moment Ormond accepted her aid, and so Alice that evening made herself much at home at Castle Cottage.

The dinner on the lawn—soon served under the superintendence of Alice—was a success; more enjoyable, they all thought, than it would have been indoors. The meat, it is true, was overdone and rather dry; the vegetables, too, were overdone, and they had to do without the junket. But it is questionable if they paid much attention to what they ate. What remained afterwards in memory was their own good spirits, the feeling of friendliness, the absence of restraint, the soft evening light, the birds singing in the shrubbery, and the perfume of the pinks.

Ormond saw the ladies home, and as he walked back from their house to his own he took a resolution towards which he had been advancing for some months. He would ask Alice to share with him the life of Castle Cottage.

There would be an end, it is true, of all his fine theories and experiments, but what does it matter if theory gets smashed up provided we fall on practice that makes us happy! A bachelor running his show all by himself is, he saw, a poor creature the instant she appears to whom he gives his heart. Previous to that it is all right; after that all wrong.

But what would Alice say to it? was the question.

He put the matter to the test on the following day. This not being a love-story, but only the record of some difficulties of a lone bachelor, all we need say is that Alice's answer made unnecessary Ormond's further study of the problem of every man his own housekeeper.

Both to him and to her it was the happiest thing that could have happened. Everyone said so and wished them well, except Miss Euphemia Leslie. She had heard the tale of the dinner from Polly, who was a little news-bag if ever there was one. Disappointed that her own schemes had miscarried, she had a fling at our friends, and gave out that Mr. Ormond was about to marry Miss Chapman for no other reason than that his stove smoked.

They were married in the autumn, and may all weddings be as happy as theirs has turned out.

* * * *

The day after their return from the wedding tour, Alice put her head out of a window that overlooked the back yard of Castle Cottage. "What is that you are burning?" she asked of Andrew, who seemed to have his hands full of business.

"Come out and see," answered he.

And when she went out she found he had made a fire and was burning papers.

"You are just in time," he remarked, "to see the end of now a quite useless manuscript," and as he spoke the breeze caught the topmost sheet and wafted it up into the apple-tree, and in floating past Alice she noticed that the flame was in the act of licking out the words—

"*The New Man; or, Woman Entirely Dispensed With.*"

It looked like the triumph of woman; yes, that it did.

* * * *

And so ends this authentic narrative, the moral of which—should a moral be called for—is that man is the better for having a wife provided he can get the right one.

[THE END.]