

A LADY AND A SPIRIT.

By LINA ORMAN COOPER, Author of "We Wives," etc.



It was the family field day. That is what the master of the house called it. Other folk, Annette Bond amongst the number, spoke of it as the Bowen Spring Clean.

It was not a cheerful day, far from it. Little Mrs. Bowen looked worried and heated and worn. Mr. Bowen uncomfortable. The children looked—must I confess it?—hungry! You see, soft boiled eggs have a habit of smashing up when eaten on the stairs, and cool tea is not sustaining. There was no time to prepare anything more substantial, with Bridget scouring away at window-shutters and skirting-boards, the mistress shaking curtains and blankets, and the ubiquitous charwoman reigning over chaos in the kitchen.

Mr. Bowen, conscious of indescribable bicycle rags and oily compounds routed out of his study, was meeker than usual, but was about to give way to sarcasm *re* afternoon tea, when Miss Bond appeared on the scene. We have made this lady's acquaintance before, when, as a lady, she presided over the Bowen laundry. We find her crisp and capable and every other "c" in the calendar, as per usual, brimful of information and energy and good nature.

She took in the situation at a glance. In a very few minutes both Mr. and Mrs. Bowen were seated at a dainty tea equipage. Bridget, virtuous and hot, was "claning" herself, and Mrs. Jones had departed in dudgeon. All because Miss Bond had promised a more satisfactory "help" on the morrow!

She brought him in a bottle! He cost only one and eightpence, yet the latent energy stored in our volatile friend (No, I don't refer to Miss Bond. She was never in her life frivolous!) caused dust and fly-specks, grime and smoke to flee away as if by magic. No need to drive them out with much labour, much expenditure of Herculean strength or application of elbow-grease. Our friendly spirit acted as spirits always do—gently, quietly, and effectively.

First of all, the terra-cotta paint in Mrs. Bowen's bedroom was attacked. It had been ruthlessly scrubbed on former occasions by the vigorous Bridget, until the streaks of red on its face were more like the lines on a russet apple than anything else. In some places the paint was actually pallid from rubbing, and the plain boards appeared. Yet, withal, it had a smeary, unfinished look about it, until Miss Bond caused our spirit to step in and do his work.

Then the terra-cotta window-ledges and cornice-poles emerged bright and shining from a simple application of soft flannel, wetted in a liquid composed of a quart of warm water and a teaspoonful of ammonia!

Bridget could scarcely believe her eyes, as she dried the smiling cheeks of the door-jamb with a square of house blanket, and saw them twinkling beneath her hand. Certainly this volatile alkali—as the dictionary defines it—hath a pungent smell, but that soon passeth away—as doth our spirit when his work is done.

It was not yet done, however, in Mrs. Bowen's bedroom. The big swing mirror was fringed with a border of tiny fly-blows and finger-marks. The windows were dull.

A few drops of ammonia sprinkled on an old newspaper, and lightly rubbed over the surface by Miss Bond's practised hand, soon banished all films, and left no dull smudges behind. The gilt picture-frames were subjected to a like process with a similar result.

"Anything more to be done?" queried the spinster, as

she grasped her useful spirit behind a tight stopper. "Ah, yes, I see. What about those brushes, Bella? Not quite clean, are they?"

Poor little Mrs. Bowen blushed. Why is it we ladies like to have our hair-brushes and combs always in spotless array? I don't know exactly. Nor did Mrs. Bowen. Only she stammered more confusedly than ever in explaining the *raison d'être* of a certain dingy hue visible on her dainty, ivory, initialled possessions.

Miss Bond smiled.

"Fortunately you are not the owner of a 'maid,' my dear. Otherwise that wedding present of yours would have 'yelled' long before this! Our Abigails have such a propensity for using boiling water and suds for everything. Blessed is she that hath no Abigail, for her brushes will stand the wear and tear of years, if—if"—Miss Bond began to be emphatic—"she possesseth this spirit of her own."

Taking up her friend's toilet accessories, Annette Bond demanded a hand-basin and a quart of warm water. As Bridget flew to get the latter (she always flew when Miss Bond was at hand), Mrs. Bowen's mentor took up her parable and continued—

"I wish every lady knew the capabilities of her own hand-basin, Mrs. B.! Baby would have clean booties every day. Our brushes would always be *crisp and snowy*, our silk handkerchiefs never yellow and creased, our—"

But here rushed in Bridget, carefully rubbing the black off a kettle of water she carried on to her white apron. Miss Bond marked this with the corner of her eye, but made no remark. Such affectionate zeal was not to be quenched.

"Thank you," she said kindly. "Now only *warm*"—(warm in italics, please, Mr. Printer)—"water is what we want. Cold would even do, if your brushes were not quite so—ahem—soiled, Mrs. B.!"

Mrs. Bowen blushed again. Never more, she fervently hoped, would they be seen in so unladylike a state. At least when Miss Bond was by!

"To every pint, Bella, I add one teaspoonful of ammonia. Now, shake them gently in the mixture. Face downwards, of course. Getting clean? Yes, my spirit is so energetic. Another basin with soft, clean water. Thank you. That is for rinsing. Heigh, presto! Your brushes are as new, Mrs. B. Now put them on the window-ledge, if you like, or anywhere in a draught. You will find them ready for use by dinner-time, my dear."

Sure enough Mrs. Bowen found them spread out under their hailstone muslin slip before the hour named, and they were flanked by a couple of new-looking tortoise-shell combs which had been treated in the same manner.

Miss Bond was, of course, asked to stop to dinner that night. It was owing to her and her volatile spirit that there was any dinner after that "field day." The bedroom had all been cleaned. Yet Bridget had not been overdone. Roast beef and apple dumpling testified to this fact.

Now Mrs. Bowen had always prided herself on her dainty table decorations. To-day, she felt sadly conscious of very dim, smeary-looking silver. To be strictly accurate, it was not silver at all. Only best electro. Elkington's A1. But what's in a name?

How she managed it, I know not. Only in some way, without hurting Bella Bowen's feelings in the least, or causing her to blush once, talk was led round to the care of precious metals in general. To the care of silver in particular. As a result, the mistress kept a small wooden bowl in her store pantry, which was filled with water—boiling—from tea or breakfast kettle. Added to every pint was a teaspoonful of ammonia. In this, every day, forks and spoons were immersed after every meal. A Selvyt cloth was used to dry, and, for a few minutes' work, Mrs. Bowen was repaid by always having brightly burnished

glittering silver on her table. It seemed such an infinitesimal amount of labour, resulting in so satisfactory a manner.

How to use ammonia in three cases, paint, brushes, and silver, had been thus shown by demonstration. There was more to follow.

Over a roaring fire in the big drawing-room—spring is so uncertain a tide—Annette Bond told her friend of four other daily uses for her much esteemed acquaintance. She said that a spot of grease visible on the front breadth of Mrs. Bowen's light silk evening dress, could be removed by the spirit.

"It is almost uncanny in its operations," quoth little Mrs. B., as the spinster recounted the manner of exit of that spot, on application of one drop of the pure ammonia, followed by slight pressure with a hot iron. "I am afraid of it."

Miss Bond laughed; then she looked grave.

"There are many unseen powers around us, Bella. We do not know the latent forces in nature, and are only just gathering up pebbles on the shore of the sea of knowledge."

"Ahem, Shakespeare!" murmured the master of the house, who had entered unawares.

"No—Sir David Brewster, I believe," corrected Miss Bond modestly. "At any rate, it is a fact, whoever found it out."

Mr. Bowen proved it so a few minutes after. Whether, from following an unwilling lengthy period of abstinence, that roast beef was too heavy, or whether the latent force in apple dumpling was too strong for him, true it is, the master soon had an attack of severe indigestion. He pitied himself muchly. Men always do. But Miss Bond was equal to the occasion. Ten drops of her precious fluid was quickly added to a wineglassful of water, silyly, and hastily administered.

It was a safe and speedy remedy. Before the coffee cups were handed round, Mr. Bowen had forgotten that

weight upon his chest, and was smiling happily. Miss Bond was a magician. The conversation veered from east to west, and from north to south, until some moans over the state of certain plants in the porch were heard.

"Oh, I'll tell you what to do!" began Annette, but Mrs. Bowen looked firm.

"I will not have it, dear. Don't recommend ammonia again. It is too much for my nerves."

"Water them if they have over-blossomed themselves," gabbled the spinster, on a sign from the man in the chair, "with five or six drops of ammonia in each pot of water. This will stimulate highly. Too highly, if often applied, Mrs. B. Don't dose your fuchsias, and begonias, and roses, and geraniums, oftener than once a week. But, if used in moderation, you will be astonished at the result. Trusses of bloom as big as—" (she spread out her hands indefinitely) "tassels of blossoms as big as—! Foliage as flourishing as—!"

"Spare us!" was the laughing protest. "Your spirit is too much for us, Annette."

"Too much entirely," quoth Mr. B. "It does more than the 'Pickwick, the Owl, and the Waverly pen!'"

"Yes, indeed." Miss Bond was quite grave. "Ammonia is a universal solvent. I will not repeat its uses in our home laundry. You can look these up in the 'G. O. P.' for 1894 and 1895. Without it our flannels would shrink, our silks discolour, our paint wear off, our silver wax dim, our windows dull, our looking-glasses smear, our brushes 'yell,' our plants decay, our meals disagree, our hair become brittle—(Did I mention, Mrs. B., that Nellie's curls should always be washed with an eggspoonful of ammonia to each quart of water?)—and our dresses be spoiled. In fact, my volatile spirit comes as a boon and a blessing to women!"

"Hear, hear!" applauded Mr. Bowen, as he helped the visitor on with her opera-cloak. "You are a regular field of industry, Miss Bond."



THE "GIRL'S OWN" GUILD OF SYMPATHY.

ETHEL (London).—Thank you for your gift of strawberries, which arrived in splendid condition, and we gave them away in the wards. We hope others will follow your example. The best kinds of fruits to send are apples, strawberries, ripe gooseberries, and currants. These are always very acceptable.

E. B. (Seven Sisters).—In answer to your questions, the Civil Service is open to girls, and the facilities offered are certainly increasing. The age for Girl Clerks that you speak about is from sixteen to eighteen. On appointment the girls serve for six hours a day for three years, for which they receive £35 and upwards. The competition is very keen, and the subjects are arithmetic, geography, English, composition, including writing and spelling, Latin or French, or Algebra or shorthand. You must have the full approval of your parents, and be five feet in height, and if you serve six years you can obtain a very good pension.

A. J. (Bath).—Thank you very much for your gift of pinks, which are just the things that are needed in the wards. They are very strong

smelling as well as pretty. I should be very glad indeed to help you distribute any gifts of this sort, and we cannot help thinking what a blessing a well-kept garden is. It gives not only pleasure to its owner, but it helps to cheer those sick ones at a very little cost, and for that reason we are glad when we hear that a garden is cultivated to some purpose.

BESSIE and several others.—Yes, as we have said before, gifts of fruit are very welcome. You will see particulars about the stall, and about the work the members can do, at the commencement of these articles. If any further particulars are wanted, we shall be very glad to give them.

PHYLISS CLARKE (Lee).—The parcel of goods for the sale of work safely received. The contents are very welcome, and will be acceptable. The fancy reticules are really very clever indeed. You are one of our youngest members, but your enthusiasm is splendid. We shall want some six or eight members for the stalls. Will write you again on the matter.