A CAGE-MAKING WIFE.

By the Author of "How to be Happy Through Married Life."

A man in his time has been called upon to endure a great deal of detective work. He has been described as a "good idea—spoil!" This may or may not be the case. But a man who can only make a net to catch a husband, but it certainly is not true of one who can make a cage to keep him in, of whom it might be said—

"Her air, her smile, her motions, told
Of womanly completeness;
A music as of household songs
And children's laughter in the home.

"Flowers spring to blossom where she walks
The careful ways of duty;
The hard still lines of life with her
Are flowing curves of beauty."

Men are often as easily caught as birds, but, when caught, they may not be able to make her home bright and happy, so that it shall be the clearest, sweetest, cheerfullest place that her husband can find refuge in—a retreat from the toils and troubles of the outer world—then God help the poor man, for he is virtually homeless!

In the home, more than anywhere else, order is heaven's first law. It is the duty of a wife to sweetly order her cage so that it may be clean, neat, and free from muddle. Method is the oil that makes the wheels of the domestic machine run easily. The mistress of a house who desires order, and the tranquillity that comes of order, must insist on the application of method to every branch and department of the household work. She must rise and breakfast early, and give her orders early. Doing much before twelve o'clock gives her a command of the day.

The cause of many a man's ruin has been the muddle in his own house, the repulsive-ness of his own fireside, so that he has been driven to find the appearance of cheerfulness in the inn and public-house. While he has been learning habits of dissipation that have culminated in the ruin of his body and estate, his wife, meanwhile, sitting at home, has been working her wrath to keep it warm," has become sore and chronically ill-tempered. A man must be a miracle of patience if, on returning from the fatigue of his daily labour, and finding a black fire, the sitting-room in a litter, his children squalling, and his wife vexed and annoyed at his incapacity to correct the muddle, he is not also touched with the like infamy, and becomes fretful and impatient.

"A clean, fresh, and well-ordered house exercises over its inmates a moral no less than a physical influence, and has a direct tendency to make the members of the family sober, peaceable, and considerate of the feelings and habits of each other."

"Rub up your brasses, Sally," said a husband to a wife, who being, when first married, clean and orderly, was degenerating into a slut and doing nothing to keep the evidences within the pretty cottage. Every wife may find "brasses to rub up;" and if her own spirits are gloomy enough at times, and things are wrong, she may at any rate keep the externals about her bright for the sake of husband and children.

"She talks and then things won't look so bad," was the homely advice given by an old friend to a woman whose husband had lost money by the failure of a bank, and who could not see the force of the wife sitting undisturbed, with unswept floor and untidy hearth, and unprepared dinner, because this calmed the husband's temper. A friend of Robert Hall, the famous preacher, once asked him, regarding a lady of their acquaintance, "Will she make a good wife for me?"

"Well," replied Hall, "I can hardly say—I never lived with her!"

This is the real test of happiness in married life. It is one thing to see ladies on "dress" occasions, and when every effort is being made to please them; it is quite another thing to see them amidst the varied and often conflicting circumstances of household life. Men may talk in raptures of youth and beauty, wit and sprightliness, but after seven years of union not one of them is to be compared to good family management, which is seen at every meal, and felt every hour in the husband's purse. In the "Records of Later Life," Fanny Kemble (Mrs. Butler, shortly after her marriage) taking with her stepfather (being with a staff of six servants, writes from America to a friend, "I have been reproaching myself, and reproving others, and hourly regretting that I did not know better that I had not learned a little domestic economy, and how much bread, butter, flour, eggs, milk, sugar, and meat ought to be consumed per week by a family of eight persons." There is no reason why she should not have learned all this, and Italian and music as well.

Gradually it has come to be seen that practical cookery, which might be classed under the head of chemistry, is an excellent intellectual training, as it teaches the application in daily life of knowledge derived from a variety of branches of study. From this point of view even sweet girl-graduates may take pride in being good cooks, while as regards women of the working classes, hardly anything drives their husbands to drink so much as bad cookery and irregular meals. We cannot wonder that men desire to wash down the excesses of the day with the warmed clod of beef which some wives serve up day after day without any change. And as to unsettled meals, it is far easier to go for sixpennyworth of fish to the fish market than to spend the last penny on a dinner which has been prepared. Surely, a wife would vary her dishes a little, cook them up nicely, and have them hot, and to the minute; if she reflected how much her doing so might outwit the publicans! How true is the saying of Leiph Hunt, that "the most fascinating women are those that can most enrich the everyday moments of existence."

A woman should know when to change her role of housewife for that of the loving friend and companion of her husband. She should be able and willing to intelligently discuss with him the particular political or social problem that is to him of vital interest. We will all agree with Dr. Johnson that a man of sense and education should seek a suitable companion in a wife. "It was," he said, "a miserable thing when the conversation could be carried on only by questions and answers, which should be boiled or roasted, and probably a dispute about that." A good and loyal wife takes upon herself a share of everything that concerns and interests him. Never may be his work, or even recreation, she endeavours to learn enough about it to be able to listen to him with interest. She should speak to him of it, and to give him a sensible opinion if he asks for it. In every matter she is helpful. If her husband be straitened in means by any sudden loss of money, she takes part of the anxiety and does what she can to lessen it; if there comes some unexpected family misfortune, she helps to bear it with strong heart and a smile at his side; in every change and emergency of life she is truly a helpmeet for him, never for a moment letting herself be treated as a pretty burden best as a child who has no power, and no capability to meet the storms and struggles of life.

Literary husbands and men of genius sometimes had to complain that their wives became childishly jealous of their life-work. The philosopher of antiquity who would not raise his eyes for three years, lest they should rest upon a woman, had, no doubt, suffered from some woman's aggravating ways while he was trying to devote himself to the abstractions of philosophy. This is a common failing of some poets and philosophers. But with our poet husband was striving to finish a beautiful and elaborate sonnet. And all this out of spite and jealousy for some fancied neglect!

Women's lives are often very dull; but it would help to make them otherwise if wives would sometimes think over, during the hours when parted from their husbands, a few little winning ways as surprises for them on their return, either in the way of conversation or of some small change of dress, or in any way their ingenuity would have suggested in courting days. How little the lives of men and women would be dull if they thought of and acted towards each other after marriage as they did before it!

Certainly, it does a wife good to go out of her cage occasionally for amusement, although her deepest, truest happiness may be found at home. Such an escape from the care and routine of life gives change and recreation; but, while this is true, she must never forget that a life of pleasure is a life of pain, and that if much of her time is spent in gay society and gay company and confusion at home must be the consequence.

"Never seek for amusement," says Mr. Ruskin, "but be always ready to be amused. The least thing has joy in it, the slightest word will, when your hands are busy and your heart is free. But if you make the aim of your life amusement, the day will come when all the agений of a pantomime will not bring you an honest laugh."

The song says that home is sweet, and that there is no place like it. But this depends upon the sort of home. There are homes that are no homes. The wife is the sun of the social system; unless she attracts, there is nothing to keep heavy bodies like husbands from flying off.

Milton tells us that a good wife is "Heaven's last, best gift to man." But what constitutes a good wife? Partly of thought and feeling, a generous, cheerful temper, a disposition ready to forgive, patience, a high sense of duty, a moderately wide range of manner. She should be able to govern her household with gentle resolution, and to take an intelligent interest in her husband's pursuits. She should have a clear head and a cool heart, and "all the firmness that does not exclude delicacy, and all the softness that does not imply weakness."