

The "Newspaper Woman"

By John Pendleton

MRS. OLIPHANT and Mrs. Hodgson Burnett frankly confessed that they began writing for a livelihood. Many other women are confronted with similar necessity; but they are more fortunate in the new century than their predecessors, inasmuch as the position of the fair sex with regard to occupation has greatly improved. Marriage is not obsolete, and one hears now and again, the earnest question: "Has she done well?" But notwithstanding Mrs. Creighton's assertion that "men and women, as a rule, reach their fullest development through married life," the wedded state is not the sole objective of every woman's existence. The modern woman has other interests beyond household duties and cares. She is treading new paths that lead from the fireside into the world. She has already become physician, barrister, architect, sanitary inspector, teacher, artist, musician, cookery lecturer and demonstrator, typist, and telegraphist, and if the poet's estimate of a woman's tongue be accepted, she is certainly in her element at the telephone.

Journalism also is particularly attractive to her active mind, tireless tongue, and nimble fingers, and the "Newspaper Man" is shouldered by the "Newspaper Woman." After snub and ridicule she is steadily making a position for herself, and for the past few years has been recognised on the weekly press as a useful worker. With one or two notable exceptions, she has not yet invaded the ranks of daily journalism, for though a large number of women are obtaining a livelihood, or striving to obtain a livelihood, by writing for the papers, the first all-round woman journalist—the woman prepared to undertake any work on a morning newspaper—has not appeared.

Her diffidence may be partially accounted for by the fact that the barbarous notion still lurks in the editorial mind that woman's place is at home. An editor who holds this

sardonic view said recently at a press gathering: "I have never been able to reconcile myself to the lady journalist. These (pointing to the ladies in the room) are our lady journalists. They keep their vigil through the night when we are wrestling with the problems of the earth, and they chase the housemaid off the staircase, and do battle with the organ-grinder when we are snatching a few hours' sleep. In doing that they are better employed than in going to a milliner's shop and getting a bonnet to review." But it should not be forgotten that humorous rhetoric brings scanty consolation to a woman on the look-out for a livelihood. Her courage, no doubt, is quite equal to the swift pursuit of housemaid, and even to battle with organ-grinder; but her chance of getting a husband to safeguard in slumber may be remote. Nay, her individual trend may be averse from this novel athletic vigil, especially if she dissents from the Russian proverb: "Home is a full cup."

The woman without opportunity of marriage, or disinclination to it, is justified in adopting any honourable profession, and journalism affords her one of the readiest openings. She can enter it whenever she pleases, and if she is a woman of ideas, with ability and determination to carry them out, if she has journalistic aptitude and a quick pen, she will by original suggestion, or actual work, inevitably attract the notice of the editor.

James Payn, the novelist, though an experienced publisher's reader, admitted that he rejected the MSS. of a brilliant writer. But the editor of a daily journal will not reject any communication, brilliant or mediocre in style, if there is anything new in it. The most jerky paragraph giving the latest news, rushed into the "stop-press" edition of the paper at two o'clock in the morning is of infinitely greater value than the long leading article, which may be cleverly written, but simply comments upon what

everybody knows. The news hunger of the British public is insatiable; and the journalist sharp enough to get hold of a "good thing," whether it be Cabinet secret, political move, or any happening that is unexpected, thrilling, and more than usually interesting in the vortex of human life, should not tarry on the doorstep of the newspaper office. No editor or sub-editor would decline to accept such news, if authentic, whether brought in by "newspaper man" or "newspaper woman." For instance, the smart lobbyist of the *Times* was enabled to announce exclusively in that paper the exact amount of the king's yearly grant from Parliament. The leading journal was threatened with all sorts of pains and penalties for its divulgence of the information, even to the exclusion of its representatives from the House of Commons; but the outraged dignity of honourable members subsided into admiration of the enterprising pressman who was first in the field with intelligence to which the nation had a perfect right.

There is abundant opportunity of obtaining special information outside the ordinary news channels; and the man or woman who can do this correctly and speedily is exceedingly useful on the staff of a daily newspaper. The director of morning or evening journal is mainly dependent on the agencies for his news. He fidgets at the sameness of the supply. His paper differs from that of his opposition contemporary in title and in political leaning; but the news it contains is, in paragraph and long special telegram, very much the same as his opponent's. The nightly heap of "flimsy" bears the same impress, and deals with the same events. The Press Association, the Central News, or Reuter dominate nearly every column in the paper, and the editor is secretly dissatisfied with the arrangement that collective enterprise has established, and newspaper economy encouraged. Every editor worth his salt is intensely selfish—on duty. He wants all the news to himself; and if he can by bold stroke, either of policy or expenditure, secure a "really good thing" in the way of special and exclusive news, he has it double-leaded, with a conspicuous heading. His paper is lifted out of the

ruck, and he is happy—till his rival, stung to desperation, succeeds in forestalling him and chuckles in turn.

It is rather by the process of news-getting than by writing articles on what to wear, and how to wear it, that the "newspaper woman" will soften the heart of the obdurate editor. If she can bring news that will sell the paper, and get it talked about, she can obtain employment without begging and praying, however strong the editor's prejudice against the woman journalist. When she gets a footing her career will depend entirely upon her ability to initiate and execute, and to some extent on her capacity to bear the physical and mental strain of newspaper work, which is done at all hours and often under the most difficult and trying conditions.

One writer says: "If a woman cannot do night work, and regular night work, the prizes of Fleet Street are not for her. I do not say that a woman may not make a living; but she will have to content herself with a kind of journalism far removed from literature—with the chatty article, or the woman's paper, or the hundred and one scrappy periodicals which have so successfully hit off the taste of the rising generation." If by the prizes of Fleet Street the writer means appointment on the Parliamentary reporting corps, or in the sub-editor's room, or to the editorial chair of a London morning newspaper, the woman journalist is likely to be debarred from these engagements for some time. It would be useless, at present, to give a woman, however expert as a shorthand or a descriptive writer, a position on the gallery staff of a daily journal, because the Sergeant-at-Arms would not permit her to enter the House in that capacity. She may, possibly, have the opportunity of night sub-editing; but night sub-editing on a London or provincial morning paper is a very different task from the sub-editing of a weekly journal devoted to dress, fashion, and cookery; and she will be wise if she puts on her "considering cap" before she attempts it. There is no prize in such drudgery. It is improbable, even if she is prepared to face regular night work, that she will be offered the editorship of a London

daily. She is, at present, untried; and it is doubtful whether, even if the position were gained, she could occupy it long, for the responsibility, annoyance, and wear and tear, tax the energy and forbearance of the strongest man.

But there is a great variety of work on the weekly and daily press that a woman can do. Several papers have women on their literary staffs, and experience has proved that they are as expert, and in some cases more expert than men. They act as interviewers, as special correspondents, as chroniclers not only of society functions and smart weddings, but of political and industrial developments. They have greater patience than men in recording the proceedings at gatherings held in the interests of women. They describe, more or less trenchantly, the struggle of woman for emancipation from the thralldom in which man has kept her since the heathen age when the "Lord of Creation" believed:

A dog, a wife, and a walnut-tree,
The more you beat them the better they be.

They write articles on any subject touching upon home life, from the nursing of babies to the complex domestic servant problem. They tell us all about feminine culture, occupation, and recreation, and how some women, as a variant from the monotony of home life, busy themselves in distant parts of the empire, and with exploration in remote lands. They assert that woman, whose lot hitherto has been to be loved and cherished, or beaten and kicked, according to the varying mood of her lord, has, after all, a strong individuality—that she is, at all events, the mental equal, and sometimes the physical superior of man; that she is capable of almost any toil of which he is capable, and that she is not necessarily a "blue stocking" because her life to-day is full of new activity, and infinitely more useful than it was half a century back, when maid and matron were content with an uneventful existence, and had scarcely any relaxation from the daily round of domestic duty.

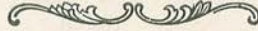
There are, some writers contend, natural restrictions to a woman's career as a journalist; but if she decides to be a recorder of

events, rather than a literary or mechanical putter together of the paper, these restrictions will probably turn out to be more sentimental than real. The days of election riots are over. A football match, with the tendency of the crowd to horse-play, is perhaps the roughest engagement she would be called upon to describe; and her athletic training in the shin-barking game of hockey has possibly prepared her for any eventuality, even to the mobbing of the referee.

The *Daily News* has gone through many editorial vicissitudes; but it has at least one distinction—it introduced the lady journalist. Nearly half a century ago Harriet Martineau was asked by the then editor to contribute to the paper. She did so, writing two, four, and finally six leading articles a week. "Her peculiar genius," says one writer, "stamped itself on all these articles. She was probably the most remarkable woman in an age which brought forth such women as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, Mrs. Somerville, and Christina Rossetti." For eight years she contributed leading articles and obituary notices to the daily journal Charles Dickens founded, and she also proved that there are few natural restrictions to the pursuit of journalism by women, for she acted as special correspondent to the paper during a two-months tour in Ireland, describing "all that she heard and felt in her keenly observant wanderings." The "newspaper woman" has not yet taken the fullest advantage of Harriet Martineau's example. She works zealously for such journals as the *Gentlewoman*, and the pile of fashionable and homely papers that bewilder the newsagent; but with a few notable exceptions she is not yet altogether acceptable as a regular member of the staff on influential morning papers. Specially gifted women have now and again been accredited by London and provincial papers as correspondents at home and abroad, and they have done the work well; but though the "newspaper woman" has become a valuable contributor to "the woman's page," and occasionally writes leading or special articles, she has hardly touched the fringe of toil on the daily press.

Editorial prejudice is often the slave of circumstance, and she may brush it aside with the offer of exclusive news, or of articles that he thinks indispensable; but to succeed in journalism the "newspaper woman"

must be diplomatic and indomitable. She should also be able to specialise; and the subject she selects need not necessarily be the tedious one, to the male editor, of dress and fashion.



Dot's Christmas-Tree

By the Rev. Victor L. Whitechurch

Illustrated by Gordon Browne

IT was just a poor little house in a row of half a dozen shabby buildings like itself. Little the landlord cared whether they were clean or dirty, whether the rain came in at the roof or the winter winds blew coldly through the cracks in the ill-made doors, so long as the rent was ready when he came round every Monday morning. This particular cottage, however, was clean if mean. But that was not the landlord's doing. If there was a word he hated it was "repairs." So Bennett, himself, the humble tenant, managed it himself. It might be that the walls were papered with odds and ends of many-coloured and many-patterned wall-paper that he had bought for a few pence, but then it was clean, and there was an unending delight for the children in waking up early in the morning and watching the queer patterns and patches. It meant variety, especially when they were interspersed with bright pictures picked up from time to time out of old illustrated periodicals. And the kitchen was always cosily warm, despite the little fire, for Bennett had patched up all the cracks in the back door effectively, if not artistically. As for the front "parlour," a tiny room about ten feet square, it was a genuine "paradise" to the children, with its bit of shining linoleum, its patchwork hearthrug, its four antimacassared chairs, its three startling-coloured pictures of Scriptural scenes, its gaudy blue glass mantelpiece ornaments, and the won-

derful big Bible on the table that had belonged to Bennett's grandfather—a room only to be entered on Sundays and with slippers on feet.

The family was poor, but not needy, and Bennett thanked God like the Pharisee, but with the spirit of the Publican, that he was not as other men were, who drank and had slatternly wives accordingly. He knew they generally went together, though sometimes the former was the cause of the latter, and sometimes it was the other way about. At all events, it meant anything but "home, sweet home," and ready money for the baker. He couldn't expect to be rich with the eighteen shillings he pocketed on Saturdays—his wages as a platelayer—for three children and a weekly rent of five-and-ninepence do not allow of much saving, but at all events he and his wife "paid as they went," and were happy, though they had to "go" carefully. And generally, when the week's expenses were reckoned up, there was a copper or two over for the children's money-boxes, which was a delight to all—more especially to the children, who were saving with a mighty purpose in view.

These children were a sweet little trio. There was Peter, aged nine, the hope of the family, a bright little chap with a merry smile and a great capacity for wearing out boots. Next came Lizzie, a quiet, solemn little thing of eight, with deep blue eyes that beheld the tiny universe around her with