

## KITCHEN TROUBLES.



A NEW BROOM SWEEPS CLEAN.

WHEN I first married Humphrey Deane, everyone said what an exceedingly rash marriage it was for any girl in her sober senses to undertake.

To begin with, Humphrey was a struggling doctor—delightful, of course, and really very clever, but as yet only making his way among the wary householders of Linton. We should have rather less than £250 a year to live on, and, of course, it would be rather a tight squeeze with the certain amount of appearance to keep up which is necessary

in a doctor's position. Then, a maiden aunt of a rather muddling disposition had lived with Humphrey for years, and had furnished the house in solid matter-of-fact fashion, and trained the servant in the way she should go, and regulated the household in a manner very unattractive indeed to outer eyes.

I had been brought up under very different auspices. My mother's household was one where refinement and luxury held sway, and my friends considered that my training had not been one calculated to overcome the difficulties of the position.

When we returned home from our honeymoon, we found that Miss Deane had departed on a visit, and had left word that she would return to us in a month's time. Meanwhile, she had got the house ready for my reception, and everything looked very highly polished and totally unattractive.

"Does Aunt Laura intend to live with us?" I asked in dismay, and my husband's answer was not reassuring.

"My darling, I don't know. Any way, we've got a whole month to ourselves, to begin with."

So we had, and in that month I determined to work miracles.

I discovered that Humphrey had never known, since he settled in Linton, what it was to have a comfortable meal well served; and when breakfast was over, the morning after our return, I made my way to the kitchen.

The house was a fairly large one, and Clara, the melancholy-faced but very worthy maid-of-all-work, was in a perpetual state of exhaustion and depression.

It was perfectly possible, I felt convinced, for the maid to do all our work comfortably with a little arrangement, and I had already been turning the matter over in my mind.

The kitchen was a pleasant one, with a scullery and wash-house leading out of it, but at present it looked a little dreary, and there was a want of arrangement about details which was very evident.

I began by making a speech, which somehow was prompted by my large holland cooking apron and housekeeping keys, hanging by their steel chain.

"Clara," I said, "I dare say you have heard the proverb that 'new brooms sweep clean.' Now, I am a new broom, and I mean to sweep very clean; in fact, to sweep away any little arrangement I do not quite approve of. If you like to help me in my sweeping, it will be very nice to work together; if not, you had better begin to look out for another situation. But remember, I don't want to lose you at all."

Clara gasped. She was rather a hopeless-looking



BREAKERS AHEAD.

girl, with a middle-aged cast of countenance, and a fearful and wonderful taste in caps.

"Yes 'm," she said. "I'm sure I don't want to go, and I'll do anything you like."

This was a promising beginning, and I beamed upon her at once.

"Very well, then; we will begin immediately with a new plan of work which I have mapped out for you on this nice card."

And I proceeded to fasten upon the kitchen wall a large neatly-written card with an illuminated border, at which Clara gazed with open eyes.

MONDAY :—Clean the drawing-room, bedroom, and sitting-room.

TUESDAY :—Dining-room and servant's room.

WEDNESDAY :—Clean surgery. Devote the afternoon to cleaning the silver.

THURSDAY :—Mangle, iron, and finish the clothes which the washerwoman has washed on Tuesday.

FRIDAY :—Clean passages.

SATURDAY :—Clean kitchen and offices.

Rise early, and be dressed neatly at lunch-time.

Remember that refinement does not mean extravagance, and that a good heart makes light work.

"Lor, mum, it's beautiful!" gasped Clara, much admiring the effect against the drab painting of the walls.

"To begin with," I said, much relieved that my domestic was not going to take fright at the new *régime*, "we will nail up a picture or two to cheer you, and to encourage you to wear a lovely cap and apron every afternoon. For a household is usually judged by the world according to the appearance of the maid that answers the door; and grimy hands are very often an index to a grimy home."

"Yes 'm," said Clara feebly.

"Have you no ideas for breakfast beyond fried bacon and boiled eggs?" I went on cheerfully. "Dr. Deane says he sometimes gets a little tired of the same thing dressed always the same way. One morning we might have bacon fried with a little potato left from the day before. Another time, bacon cut thin and rolled in batter. And again, dried haddock is very good cut in small pieces, boiled, and served up with parsley butter, flavoured with a dash of chili vinegar. Then fresh herrings, split open, cleaned, sprinkled with oatmeal, and fried, are delicious. Coffee, too, is more drinkable with boiled milk instead of the lukewarm contents of the jug to which we were treated this morning, Clara."

"Miss Deane didn't care about them sort of things. She thought as long as we had food, it didn't matter how it was cooked."

"Well, you see, Clara, I don't think the same as Miss Deane, and no doubt she would much prefer to see things prettily served up. I shall take charge of the china cupboard and the store cupboards, and they must be spotlessly clean and neat. The silver that we are not using I shall keep in green baize bags, which will prevent it from being scratched."



A SMASH.

"We never washed at home in Miss Deane's time," said Clara doubtfully.

"No; but we are going to do so now," I answered. "We shall have a woman in to do the washing of the clothes and part of the mangling, and then you and I between us will do the starching and the ironing. Washing at home is often spoken of as a terrible infliction, but, properly managed, it is one of the simplest matters under the sun, and saves many pounds in the year. I am particularly fond of white curtains and bed hangings, and of course they must be kept very dainty. I will show you the valances I intend to put on every bed in the house, instead of the old-fashioned ones. They are just a slip of white dimity thrown over the palliasse, trimmed at either end with embroidery, and just short enough to clear the floor, so that they may be pulled off and washed when dirty. Clara, I don't like carpet on the kitchen floor. You must take this bit up and throw it away, and I will get you a piece of oil-cloth, with a small rug to put your feet on in the evenings when it is cold. Carpet catches the grease, and is horrid for a kitchen."

"Yes 'm," murmured Clara, with a dismal presentiment that the last landmark of old times was to be swept away.

"You know that we must not expect to go through life without coming across a few troubles on our way; and although you tell me that you have not met with any cooking accidents yet, still it is just as well to be prepared, in case of an emergency. Supposing that you are so unfortunate as to overturn a kettle or pan full of boiling water upon yourself, and I should not be at home, you must immediately mix some common kitchen whitening with sweet oil or water. Plaster the whole of the burn and some inches beyond it with the above, after mixing it to the consistency of common paste. It acts like a charm in quieting the pain. Keep the mixture moist from time to time with oil or fresh water, and at night wrap the whole part in flannel or gutta-percha, to keep the moisture from evaporating. If, on the other hand, you happen to cut yourself, and the wound is a severe one—near perhaps to an artery—send for the doctor at once. But while he is coming, bind up the cut limb with a clean handkerchief tied tightly just above the cut to stop the bleeding, and hold it under a tap of running water, so that the circulation may be thoroughly chilled. If you have grazed the skin off your hand, be very careful always to tie it up from the air in a piece of rag or a glove finger; for very often blood poisoning is the result of a neglected injury, slight though it may seem, through contact with impure substances—washing-up water or black lead. I do not expect you to be absolutely infallible in the way of breakages, but I do expect you to be absolutely truthful in confessing every breakage to me. Some servants, so soon as they chip or damage any piece of china, throw it away into the ash-bin at once, thinking that its absence will not be noticed. Now, if you have the misfortune to smash any of my lovely new china, bring it to me at once, before any morsel of it is lost; and I have a capital bottle of cement which will make the cup or plate nearly as good as new again. Only don't go in for wholesale smashing on purpose to try if the cement is as good as I say."

Clara laughed heartily, and I continued:—

"One other point which I shall never weary of trying to impress upon you is that the virtue of punctuality is one of the most important that a servant can possess. I want you to try to have one hour for doing every single duty in the day, and to keep to it always, without variation. I am going to have a bell hung in my bedroom to ring just at the head of your bed, and I shall ring it at half-past six every morning. Half-an-hour's lateness in the morning will throw you half-an-hour wrong all the day through till bedtime, and half-an-hour gained in the morning means a gain in temper, tidiness, and looks, for a good temper is the surest road to the possession of a pleasing face."

Here I paused for lack of breath, though not of ideas, and Clara began again, in a voice which showed she was impressed by my notions.

"The master said that I used to burn a deal too much coal, ma'am; and to do tasty dishes you want such a very hot fire."

"There are several ways of saving coal, Clara. For one thing, you must have a cinder basket, and sift the cinders every morning, throwing only the dust into the ash-bin, as the lumps make very hot fires. I will also get you a little cooking stove with a spirit lamp, which you can use in the summer for making small dishes, and which will occasionally save the lighting of a fire. For the drawing-room this winter I mean to invest in fire-balls, which are made of fire-brick, and when red-hot give out quite as much heat as coals. I also intend to have a fire-basket in the dining-room, which in the evening can be carried off bodily to my bedroom with its contents, and will save lighting a fire there. In the surgery we will have a gas stove, which can be turned on at need, and then extinguished."

Clara was balancing a spoon meditatively in her hand while I was speaking, and the dull appearance of the silver caught my eye at once.

"I don't think that you quite understand the theory of cleaning silver," I continued. "Of course my



ELBOW GREASE.

wedding presents are all brilliantly new at present, but the plate belonging to the house strikes me as very much out of order. I like to have a positively glittering dinner-table, and it is a very easy matter, after all ; for it only needs plenty of elbow-grease, and when the plate is in order very little powder is necessary. You must wash the silver every day, after using, in warm soft water, with a little soda and plenty of yellow soap. Dry it on a soft towel, and polish it up with a good chamois leather. If this is done every day, 'Plate Powder' need only be used once a week, or less often even than that. Then all the table glass must be washed in a special wooden bowl, which must be used for nothing else, for fear of grease. A lather of soapsuds is better than actual soap, and each piece of glass should be dried on soft linen. When placing the glasses upon the dinner table, you should either handle

them with a cloth or a clean glove, as there is nothing more disagreeable than seeing a finger-mark upon a tumbler."

"You seem to be very particular, ma'am ; but I'll do my best to please you, and I hope you will help me to improve myself," said Clara cheerily, as she shouldered a tray full of breakfast things, and followed me out of the room.

"We will attack the drawing-room and dining-room to-morrow, Clara," I said, as I opened the door of the linen cupboard. "I have great ideas for those rooms, and I mean to have the prettiest house in the whole of Linton !"

Clara smiled sympathetically, and I heard her singing blithely over her work that morning ; and my bedroom fireplace shone like burnished metal with the amount of elbow-grease she put into it.

## HOW A WILDERNESS BECAME A GARDEN.

## SECOND SERIES.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND

## A TALK ABOUT FERNS.

IT was Christmas Day, and our old friends John and Alice Smith were, in accordance with a previous agreement, paying their return visit to their neighbours Charles Robinson and Mary, his niece. Ample justice had already been done to the time-honoured roast beef, plum-pudding, and mince pies, when a good round log that had a few minutes before been placed on the drawing-room fire suddenly gave vent to such a pyrotechnic explosion, that the happy quartette but just seated quietly around the grate started to their feet, and took an abrupt and mirthful flight to the centre of the room. This certainly gave a turn to the conversation, for presently the host called to his guest :

"What voyage of discovery are you on *now*, John?"

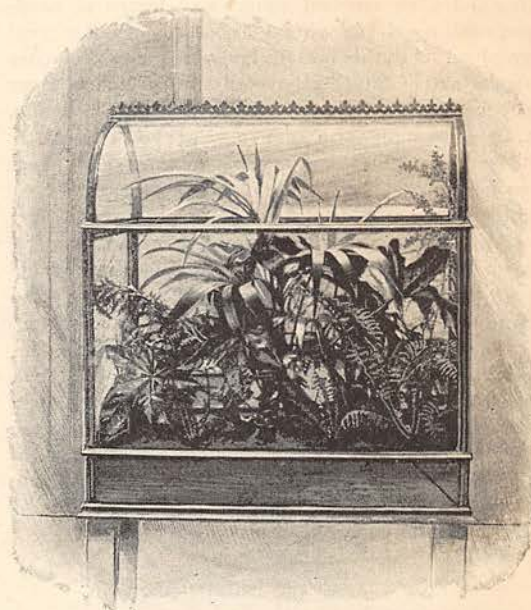
"I am looking," said John, in reply, peering about him as he spoke—"I am looking at this miniature Crystal Palace."

"Oh yes ; is it not charming?" said Charles, quickly closing a book he was casually looking at ; "though I suppose I must not sing the praises of my own handiwork."

All four had now gathered round the object of curiosity under discussion, which Alice described as a pretty little greenhouse.

Charles thought it a good opportunity to begin a gardening lecture, and forthwith entered upon his explanatory address.

"This little greenhouse, as you aptly describe it, Mrs. Smith, was the contrivance of a certain Mr. Ward, many, very many years ago, for the cultivation of plants, and more particularly of ferns, in rooms, and in consequence they have ever since been called, after their founder, Wardian cases. Of course we can make them of any size."



WARDIAN CASE.

"And after all," continued Charles, "a Wardian case may be said to be little more than a pot of flowers on a large scale, and with a bell-glass over it. For this is really what we do. Here, you see, I utilised first a strong old box, an old *oak* one—for good  *durable* material is essential for our purpose—as a common deal one, with its sides roughly put together, would very probably fall to pieces after a short time. Anyhow, *oak*, of course, is not a necessity, but  *strength* certainly is. Well, this box, you see, is rather better than a foot in depth, and I first of all removed its lid, and next I

## DRAWING-ROOM PROBLEMS.



MY drawing-room was one of those rooms which one longed to annihilate bodily with a large Turk's head broom.

It was neatly adorned with carefully nailed up chimney-piece hangings and valance, and very stiffly starched white lace curtains.

There was a good variety of wax flowers under tall glass shades, and several family photographs in plush and electro frames, wherein various members, both male and female, smirked and attitudinised.

The curtains were tied up with sky-blue silk handkerchiefs, and the door and wood-work beautifully grained. In fact, it was just the sort of room that it was perfectly impossible for anyone to use save on a Sunday afternoon in one's best clothes.

I was standing gazing at it next day, and wondering if I should ever metamorphose it into the pretty room of my imagination before the Linton people came to call, when Humphrey came up behind me and

slipped his arm round my waist.

"Darling, I am afraid that this room is somehow not like you," he said in a perplexed voice. "But I have a little sum put away in case of emergencies which you have *carte blanche* to use. I know you will not be extravagant."

"Indeed—indeed, dear Humphrey, how good you are to me!" I said, turning my face up confidentially towards him. "I will be very economical, but you do see, don't you, that this room somehow does not match with my pretty gowns?"

I had in my mind's eye the lovely creation in pale blue and silver in which I had been married, and in which I intended to receive my guests. Surely the whole effect of the costume would be absolutely ruined by the prevailing colouring.

Humphrey gave me a little nod of sympathy, and ran downstairs and out on his rounds, while I put on a large apron, and, with Clara's help, turned everything out of the room on to the landing, for my drawing-room was on the first floor—always more convenient in a doctor's house.

The carpet was a brilliant Brussels, which had been the pride of Miss Deane's heart.

I ruthlessly condemned it to the best bedroom, and got some oak staining from the nearest shop, with which we covered the floor.

When this was dry, we produced a grand polish on the whole surface by scrubbing it vigorously with beeswax and turpentine, till it shone like a mirror.

I then took the dining-room hearthrug and another large rug from the landing, which wear had toned down into artistic shades, and laid them cross-ways on the floor, not too near together.

As it was summer time, I removed the fender and irons, and hung the whole fireplace with drapery of peacock blue serge, having a wide border of plush to match, and drew the curtains completely across the fireplace. The space where the fender had stood I filled in with an original device of my own.

I took three moderate-sized rough rush baskets of the hamper shape, and filled these with three luxuriant long-leaved ferns. These I strung up to the mantel-shelf across the drapery with thick brass chains, so that the baskets hung just an inch or so from the floor, and the effect was very good.

The wall-paper was an inoffensive one, with a good deal of gilding on it, and an indefinite pattern: which was fortunate, as we could not then afford to re-paper.

As the drawing-room had been a bedroom, there was, of course, no horrible gas chandelier hanging from the centre of the ceiling. But, by way of an improvement, I had the two gas brackets removed, and a brass hanging lamp substituted in the bow window, and at each side of the fireplace two branched lamps of Venetian work. These were rather expensive,



Beeswax  
& Turpentine



THE HANGING COMMITTEE.

but I looked upon them as an allowable luxury, and resolved to curtail expenses elsewhere.

The window curtain I made of peacock blue, to match the chimney-piece hanging, and arranged a broad strip of the plush at the top of the curtains instead of at the sides. In the middle of the window I hung short curtains of cream-coloured spotted muslin, with very full narrow frills, and at one side placed a big brass pot with a palm in it, the green spiked leaves of which stood out well against the white muslin. The pot, I may mention by the way, was a large old-fashioned mortar rescued from the kitchen, and polished brilliantly.

Having re-arranged the elements of the room, there remained now the most important part of all—the furnishing; and although I surveyed with satisfaction, and Clara with pride, the beginning of our handiwork, we were far from certain as to the result.

“Clara,” I said suddenly, with a marvellous inspiration, which must have been the fire of genius, “I will not have any of these mahogany tables, or these very correct drawing-room chairs with appropriate gilding in my room at all! We will furnish an attic with them and with the gilt mirror and all the brackets and antimacassars. The first thing I mean to put into this room is a corner cupboard for the china—and I will have the one from the kitchen!”

“Lor, mum!” shrieked Clara, dropping her broom with a clatter. “It’s only plain deal stained—just for the teacups and things.”

“Fetch it!” was all I said. And it was fetched.

When it was put in a corner of the drawing-room, with the doors swung back against the wall, and lined with old china plates, no one knew it again.

The shelves I covered with a piece of cheap peacock blue velveteen, and along the edge of each shelf hung cups by their handles, standing saucers and quaint old pieces of china on the shelves themselves.

Fortunately, Humphrey had a good deal of old china stowed away in an old cupboard, which no one had cared for. And I imagined Miss Deane’s face of horror as I replaced them with all the ornaments that had in her reign adorned the drawing-room, knowing that nothing is in worse taste than to mix the modern with the antique.

There was also in the kitchen a nice old-fashioned eight-day clock: not by any means a handsome one, but, as Clara scornfully termed it, a regular “kitchen thing!”

This I conveyed upstairs, and filled another drawing-room corner with it. And as the case was very battered and old I decorated it with a design in brass-headed nails, which was very effective and quickly done, first tracing out my pattern in chalk, and following it very carefully with a light hammer and as short nails as I could procure.

The wall above the fireplace was rather a difficulty, for the paper was shabby, and I could not endure the mirror that had originally hung there.

So I made Clara bring me one of the bedroom looking-glasses that had lost its frame, and secured it to the wall at some distance above the chimney-piece, making it slant out into the room.

This I draped canopy fashion with a piece of thin yellow *pongee* silk, which I festooned at intervals, and kept in place by a few of those small parcel post hampers, which, when entirely hidden by ferns drooping over the edges, looked very well. As ferns last till late into the autumn with care, I knew that my decoration would be effective, and when they faded I determined to fill the hampers with moist sand, and adorn them with any flowers or evergreens I might happen to come across.

By the bye, one great wrinkle of my own discovering was the superiority of wet sand over water for all my drawing-room vases. The flowers last much longer, and are never unpleasant when ordinary sand is used.

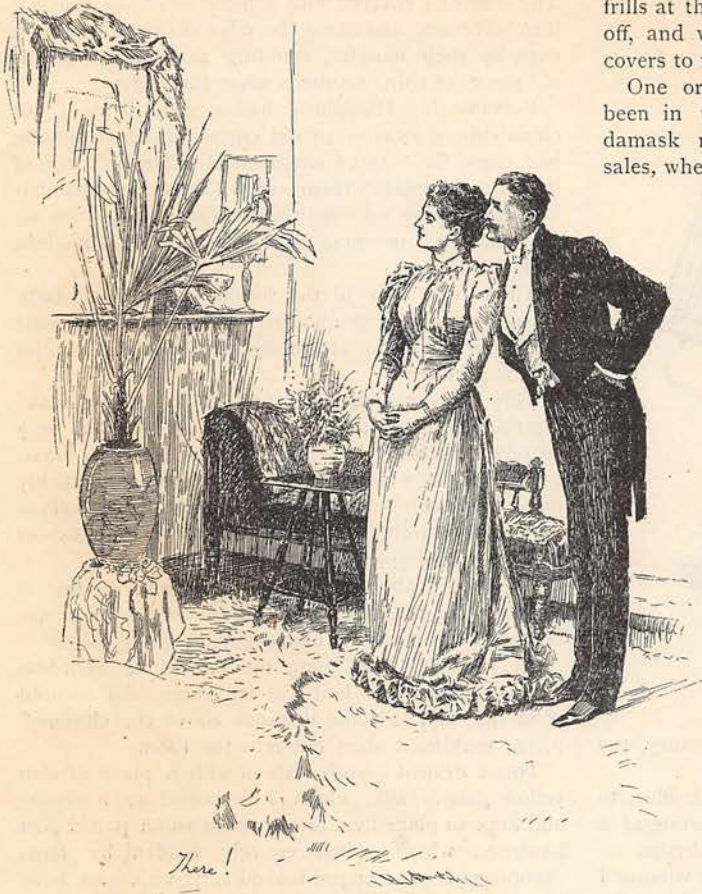
To complete my over-mantel, I hung four lovely little etchings, in plain oak frames, which had been given me, at regular intervals among the silk, and then arranged a graceful trophy of bulrushes and feathery reeds above.

“Here’s some grand pictures, ma’am!” said Clara, coming up, breathing heavily after all her exertion, with an inferior oil painting under one arm and an equally poor water-colour under the other, both in gilt frames.

“Those are for the attic,” I said, smiling and waving her away. “And very beautiful in colouring that attic will be, I am sure. I shall call it the ‘Attic of Wasted Opportunities.’”

The joke was lost upon Clara, who smiled regretfully.

“I am going to have no pictures in my room except autotypes—etchings, engravings, and photographs, unless someone gives me a Leader or a Vicat Coles,” I said.



We had had two or three beautiful signed artist proofs of some of the best pictures that had been in the Academy given us as wedding presents; and these, when hung from the wall by their wire, instead of barbaric picture-cord, were most restful to the eye.

I had determined not to make the upright piano the principal object of the room by draping it with Indian rugs and silk abominations. But I pursued a plan which was, perhaps, a little extravagant, but very effective.

I had light frames of ebony fastened to the whole of the back of the instrument, with a tiny line of gilding round them, and filled them with artistic photographs of the places we had visited on our honeymoon, with others of merely moonlight effect. Then I arranged grasses and bulrushes in a big pot at one side, and the whole effect was most artistic.

I brought up the big sofa from the dining-room, and removed to the attic the elegant abomination which was called the "drawing-room lounge." The sofa I covered with a loose cover of shiny cretonne, with an inoffensive yellow pattern upon it of chrysanthemum leaves. And as the small thin cushions one buys are more for ornament than use, I invested in two big bed pillows, and covered them with peacock blue silk, with

frills at the edge. The covers I made to slip on and off, and when these were soiled I had ready other covers to match the cretonne to replace them.

One or two good Chippendale chairs which had been in the room before, I re-seated with some old damask remnants, purchased at one of the London sales, where they are such a speciality.

Three chairs which had filled my soul with horror, as having been worked in beads by some dear departed cousin, I covered with loose frilled covers, and thus disguised, they looked quite respectable, like shrouded family ghosts.

The rest of the seats were comfortable basket chairs, with their attendant cushions upholstered to match the room.

Two small Chippendale tables I pushed against the wall, and they held my big photograph screen and some Dresden flower-vases.

On the mantel-shelf I arranged some pieces of Venetian glass, of which I was very proud.

With a few other odds and ends of furniture, such as paper-rack, waste-paper basket, and three-legged stools, I filled up the spare space, and when it was completed, and Humphrey was allowed to see the wonders I had achieved, he fell back in astonishment, and vowed that he had the cleverest little wife in Christendom, and that his practice would increase by leaps and bounds at the mere sight of the drawing-room.

"Clara," I said, when everything was finished and "Mrs. Humphrey Deane" was "at home" to visitors, "now comes the most important part of all: when my visitors arrive you are to ask them upstairs, and precede them with their cards on this silver waiter, which you are to hand to me, at the same time pronouncing their names distinctly. Then, when I ring once, you are to go straight to the front door, and show my visitors out. When I ring twice, it is for tea; three times, for more hot water. I give you all these signals so that you may be saved many a fruitless run upstairs. The tea-table I wish you to keep on the landing outside this door, and to bring it into the room when it is required. And another point that I wish to impress upon you is that the silver tea-things must be always as bright as rubbing can make them, and the bread and butter shaved as thin as a wafer. We must always have either a hot cake or a loaf cake for tea in the house, and one plate of bread and butter is enough besides. Do not on any account bring up tea before four o'clock, as people who arrive earlier do not expect to have it, and it is an uneconomical plan, as it keeps the meal dragging on so long. Our next talk will be about the dining-room; and as I intend later on to give a small 'At Home,' Clara, I shall have a great deal to say and to arrange."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry, don't you know?" began Sir Jocelyn; "but I made a mistake about the day, and then you mistook me for Walker; and then I kept it up for the joke, and then—and then—" with a look at Nell, "I got to like it rather, don't you know?"

Nell began to laugh—to laugh so infectiously that Sam and Sir Jocelyn joined in at once, and even Mr. Sutton's startled countenance relaxed into a smile.

"Abominable, I call it!" ejaculated Aunt Sarah-Lucy, but that seemed only to make them laugh all the more.

"How could you behave so badly?" gasped Nell at length.

"You must have done it uncommonly well, though," added Sam.

"I beg everybody's pardon," said Sir Jocelyn, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes; and he was promptly pardoned.

A touch of humour goes a long way towards making

the whole world kin, and as they sat down to dinner that night a wondrous friendly feeling ran through them all, Mr. Sutton entering as keenly as anyone into the joke, and Mrs. Sutton wondering whether it was Sir Jocelyn Wyndham or only the tutor who had been making love to her pretty niece.

"You promised, you know," he said to Nell as they strolled into the conservatory that evening together, "even when you believed me to be a penniless nobody! So you won't retract now, will you, dear?"

"But I believed you to be an honest, upright young man then," she answered, with a smile behind her gravity; "and now—oh, now, Sir Jocelyn, you are a base deceiver!"

"I'm awfully sorry, and I will never do it again if only you'll forgive me this once. Do, Nell," he added, looking down on her with a twinkling expression of penitence, "and then I will be good!"

So she did.

EDITH HENRIETTA FOWLER.

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DINING-ROOM DIFFICULTIES.

WHEN I had received and returned all my calls, and had been to a dinner-party or two, and enjoyed a good deal of my neighbours' hospitality, I determined to give some slight return in the shape of a simple "At Home."

So I sent out some neat white cards, with a gilt edge, to about thirty of my new friends.

*Dr. & Mrs. Humphrey Deane,*  
AT HOME,

*From 4—6. Tuesday. Music."*

To begin with, I had completed the furnishing of my dining-room, and my husband deigned to say that he liked it even better than the drawing-room.

So when I surveyed it on the day of my "At Home," the whole *coup d'œil* filled my heart with joy.

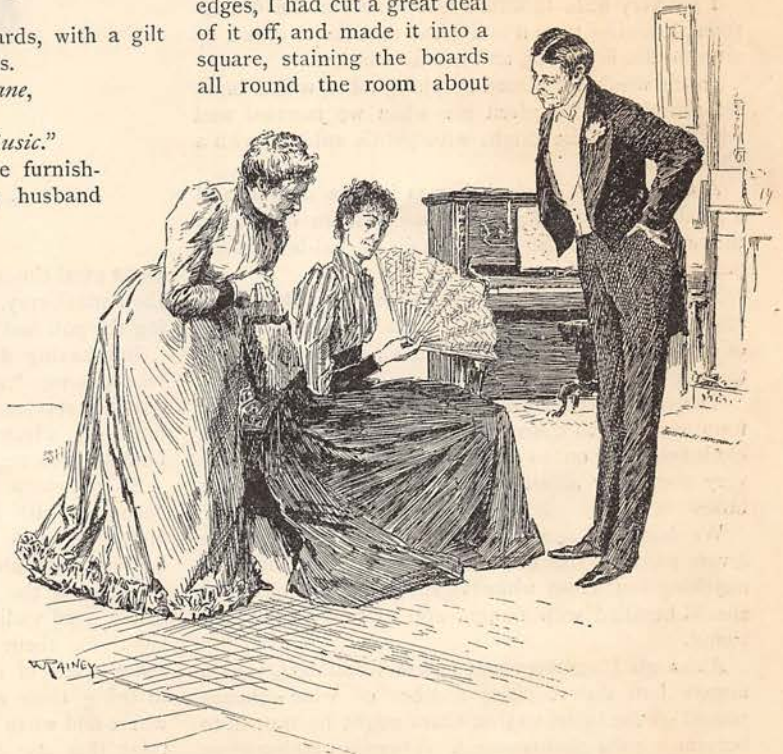
One of the great difficulties of the room had been the look-out, which was, unfortunately, into a very dreary street.

I was so tired of rush blinds and stained glass panes, that I had devised a new plan for disguising the view.

To the upper wooden frame of the window pane I fixed a thin brass rod, and also to the centre one. On these I hung thin "sparrow egg blue" muslin short curtains—two at the top, and two in the centre; and at night they were drawn completely across the window, which did away with the ne-

cessity of having a blind. And in the daytime the lower ones were drawn and the upper ones left open, so that the light was not interfered with.

As the carpet had been rather threadbare in some places, and curled up at the edges, I had cut a great deal of it off, and made it into a square, staining the boards all round the room about





two feet in depth. The chimney-piece I had stripped of its shabby hangings, and finding that it was indifferent marble underneath, preferred indifferent marble to dust-producing hangings, and left it as it was. Only over the top I laid a handsome length of damask, which hung down a few inches, and which I could take off and shake every morning. I filled the grate with two large Indian birds, which some old uncle of Humphrey's had brought home and had set up as screens.

Another pretty way of doing it, which I adopted occasionally when I was able to get out into the country, was this:—

I had found an old fire-screen which had been for years in the lumber-room, and had had it re-filled with looking-glass instead of ordinary glass. And when this was placed in the grate, reflecting back big bowls of fox-gloves and waving fern, the effect was very good.

Another unpleasant difficulty I had had to contend with—which is common to small houses—was, that the dining-room had always been pervaded with the smell of cookery, when anything savoury had been preparing in the kitchen.

We could not afford to put up a partition green baize door, which would have been an effectual bar to the odours. So, as we did not care for our visitors to know our daily menus, I placed over the outside of the kitchen door a thick dark serge curtain, which I every day sprinkled with Eucalyptus.

This made the passage delightfully fragrant, and was, besides, rather an adornment than otherwise.

I put very little furniture altogether in the dining-room, knowing that it is a great mistake to crowd up a room that is for use, and not for show.

In the window I placed a writing-table, with a brass set that had been given me when we married, and which I kept quite bright with gentle rubbing with a chamois leather.

A nice shut-up book-shelf was in one corner, and a small sofa and a few good solid chairs completed the room, save for the minor details of coal-box, waste-paper basket, and paper-rack.

The chairs were old-fashioned ones which had been seated in horsehair, and I covered them with pieces of dull-coloured red serge, nailed all round with gimp to match.

The centre tablecloth was also of the red serge, but from luncheon to dinner time I insisted on the white cloth being left on, as it creases it far less; and I was very particular about the appearance of my dinner table.

We had had some pretty white Worcester china given us, and the table was never decorated with anything but these white vases, which I determined should be filled with flowers and grasses all the year round.

Although Humphrey and I were teetotalers, yet we always had the requisite number of wine-glasses placed on the table, so that Clara might be trained to become a good parlour-maid. There is nothing more demoralising to a servant than a master and mistress

who are willing to eat their meals anyhow—who do not care whether their glass is spotless or their silver straight—and rather prefer that the butter should come in in a shapeless mass.

I kept a clean leather in the plate basket and a soft linen duster, and Clara, as she set down each piece of silver and each glass, gave it a little rub for fear of a mark being upon it. Our sideboard was a good mahogany one, and I kept there only a few brass things, such as an Indian tray and two candlesticks.

I put aside a narrow white linen cloth, to be slipped



"THE DAYS SO LONG AGO."

on at meal-times, but as all the hot dishes were put on the butler's tray, there was no fear of anything staining the polished surface.

But having digressed as to my furniture, I must return to my "At Home," and tell you how we prepared to receive thirty guests in a small house, which, until my advent, had been supposed incapable of holding even ten people.

There was a little alcove on the stairs, which I decorated with ferns and curtains for the occasion, and filled with a few chairs. Then, as my stair carpets were nice and new, I intended the younger members of the party to sit out on them, and listen to the good violin and piano-playing that I had provided for them in the drawing-room. I had also asked a few of my friends who were gifted that way to bring their songs with them, and had arranged where and when they were to sing, so that this sort of thing that one hears at every "At Home" might be avoided.

"Now, Miss Smith, do sing us that charming song—sort of lullaby thing, you know!"

"Oh, really, Mr. Brown—oh, really! I can't play anything without my notes."



"Mayn't I run and fetch your music? Surely it is in the hall?"

"If you like to run six miles, Mr. Brown, you'll find it on the piano at home," giggles Miss Smith, safe in the consciousness that she has left her music behind her. "But perhaps, if you will promise not to listen, I might try and remember," etc. etc.

And she "remembers," with very indifferent success, "the days so long ago, when her heart was wildly beating as it never beat before!"

Having arranged for the amusement of my guests, the next thing was to plan their food.

I have learnt by even my short experience of life that unless people are provided with a dainty well-thought-out tea, the party will fall flat.

And, again, I must repeat that it is not the amount that is spread upon the table, but the way it is spread, that has an influence upon people's enjoyable faculties. If you cut your bread-and-butter thick, and lump it all together on a china plate, you will find that no one touches it. But if you cut the same bread-and-butter in wafers and roll it, and then lay it on a dainty damask napkin in a brass or silver dish, your guests will enjoy it as well as though it were wedding-cake, and will announce the fact to all their friends and neighbours that you are a marvellous housekeeper, and quite worth knowing.

I determined to superintend everything personally, and myself laid the clean cloth on the dining-room table, and dotted our white vases at intervals irregularly along it, first filling them with scarlet geraniums, all stuck in wet sand.

I placed both tea and coffee equipages at one end of the table, and put Clara in charge of them, in a clean white cap and apron, a white gauntlet collar and cuffs. And she really looked so well that a glimpse in the glass amazed her!

There were plates of brown and white bread-and-butter, and thin tiny sandwiches of fresh water-cress, tomato, and cucumber. The bread part of the sandwiches I spread with salt butter, knowing that it is at the same time cheaper, and imparts a better flavour to the savoury trifles.

Two or three hot cakes, two loaf cakes, and a few

"WE SAT ALONE AT OUR DINNER-TABLE."

pretty jam cakes, completed the solid part of the feast. But in the very centre of the table I placed what is called a *compôte* of fruit, and which I knew to be very excellent, as I had made it myself.

To begin with, the more expensive kinds of fruit need not be used, as it does not matter whether they are a little damaged in packing or not.

At the bottom of a large glass bowl I put a layer of red currants, which I covered with white sugar, then a layer of white currants and sugar, then raspberries and sugar, strawberries and sugar, and lastly, a layer of tinned pine-apple.

Finally, I added several lumps of ice, and I can assure you it looked most tempting when it was finished.

It was made six hours before it was required, and left in a very cool place, so that the ice might not melt. And when I brought my guests down to tea, I had the satisfaction of seeing delighted surprise written on the faces of all those who had known my new dining-room under its former mistress.

"You are a clever little thing," Humphrey said when all our guests had departed, and we sat alone at our dinner-table. "Lady Grace looked absolutely overwhelmed with the beauty of everything this afternoon; and now here we are, dining late, and yet our weekly bills come to no more than they did before we married! How is it?"

I looked round the table.

True, we were in a sense dining late; but the meal was all *réchauffé*.

The fish was the remains of some cod we had had the night before, curried, with some beautifully done Patna rice and a chili or two.

The meat was hashed mutton, served in a silver

*entrée* dish, with a thick sauce flavoured with a dash of tarragon vinegar.

The mutton, let me add, was the last remains of our Sunday dinner—and it was now Wednesday.

The sweet was a plain bread-and-butter pudding, made out of the remains of some of the plainer cakes at tea.

And the last course was a few daintily-cut pieces of Dutch cheese, a morsel of butter, a dry biscuit, and a scrap of watercress, handed round in one of those charming dishes of silver and Worcester china that we had had given us as a wedding present.

I smiled up at him in reply.

"I am so glad that you are happy, Humphrey dear," I said softly. "Housekeeping needs as much thought and brain-power as the writing of a three-volume novel! But I have come to the conclusion that it is

just as easy to be comfortable as to be uncomfortable, and that a woman's duty to her husband is, as the poet so happily puts it :

"To soothe his sickness, watch his health,  
Partake, but never waste his wealth,  
Or stand with smiles, un murmuring, by,  
And lighten half his poverty."

"How long will this frame of mind last?" said my husband, with a mischievous smile playing round his lips, though his eyes were suspiciously bright. "When shall my portion be cold mutton, chilly potatoes, and a frown?"

"Last, you dreadful boy! Why, for ever and a day, to be sure! It is nonsense to talk about duty when my biggest pleasure in life is to make you happy!"

And if, after this little speech, I draw a discreet veil, will my reader blame me?

## HOW A WILDERNESS BECAME A GARDEN.

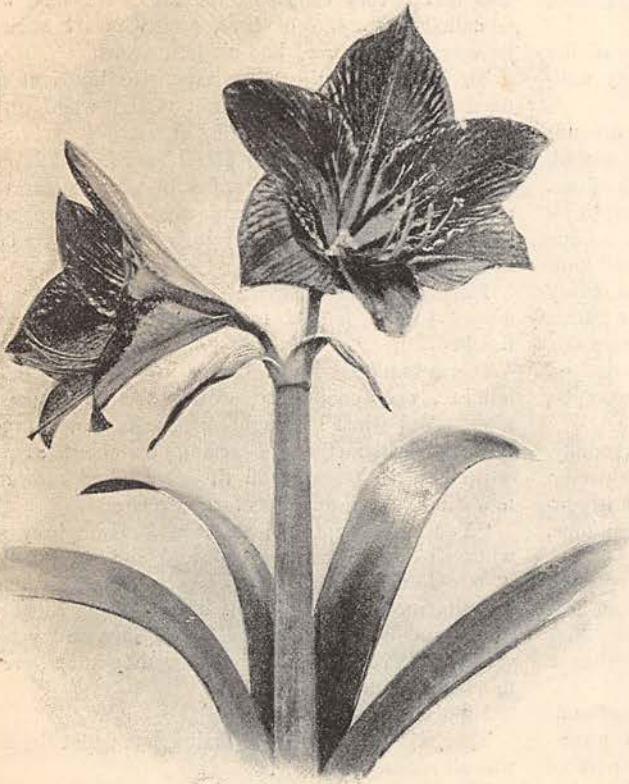
### A TALK IN THE GREENHOUSE.

"WELL, John," said Charles Robinson one brilliant June evening as he entered his neighbour's garden, "here I am again, you see, for I've had a hard day of it, and I feel strongly inclined to try the experiment of quieting my nerves by a garden talk. What a little paradise of a garden you are getting, John, and all in a single year; for remember it is but a year this midsummer that we both took up our abode at Highland Villas."

"Yes, old fellow, we are pretty gay now already, but not so gay, perhaps, as we shall be in another month, when our bedding-out plants are all in full bloom; for this is only the first of June, and some of our stock has not been out more than about ten days, for last month we had a few bitter east winds and one or two May frosts that frightened me, so I stopped short in the middle of bedding for a few days."

"Just so," said Charles; "and now it seems to me that as for some months our little greenhouses will have plenty of rooms to let now that the geranium supplies are turned out of doors, we ought to contrive to get a few brilliant flowers to stand in the greenhouse itself. Come and see my idea of *one*, at any rate," and, suiting the action to the word, he was "over the garden wall" the next minute, and giving his friend John Smith, who had followed him, a lecture in his own greenhouse.

"What a noble Amaryllis," said John;



THE "HARRY WILLIAMS" AMARYLLIS.

(Photographed from life by permission of the growers, Messrs. B. S. Williams & Sons, Upper Holloway, N.)