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THE DISTRACTIONS OF MARTHA



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MARION HARLAND

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THE DISTRACTIONS OF MARTHA



ALL WERE ON THEIR FEET IN A SECOND.

THE DISTRACTIONS OF MARTHA

BY

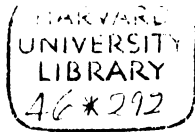
MARION HARLAND *psued.*

Mary Virginia Harlow Suckane

ILLUSTRATED BY R. EMMETT OWEN

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1906



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE FIRST CANTO OF THE DOMESTIC IDYLL .	3
II DAMPERS	17
III A "TOPPED AND TAILED" DINNER . .	32
IV JOHN HAS A NOTION	44
V WHAT MAY BE DONE WITH A CALF'S HEAD .	57
VI A CROQUETTE DINNER	73
VII AN ANGEL UNAWARES	83
VIII JOHN EATS AND MORALIZES	96
IX ENTER BRIDGET	110
X EXIT BRIDGET	122
XI THEIR FIRST DINNER-PARTY	134
XII JOHN BRINGS HOME FRIENDS TO DINNER .	147
XIII "THE IDEAL WAITRESS"	164
XIV THE COMMUTER	183
XV JACK TAKES THE MATTER IN HAND . .	208

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
ALL WERE ON THEIR FEET IN A SECOND	10
"GLASS-TOWELS ABOVE, POT-TOWELS BELOW; ALSO GRADED WASH-CLOTHS"	10
"I'LL BE GORMED IF I DON'T BELIEVE YOU AIN'T THOUGHT TO OPEN ONE ON 'EM!"	30
SHE THREW OPEN THE OVEN DOOR WITH DRAMATIC EFFECT	50
IT WAS HOPELESSLY UNPALATABLE—A FITTING CLIMAX TO A DAY OF DISASTERS	56
MARTHA HAD FORGOTTEN THE "THING" UNTIL IT WAS BROUGHT INTO THE GRAY-AND-BLUE KITCHEN	58
MARTHA GOT UP TO REMOVE THE PLATES AND BRING IN THE SALAD	78
"OH, YOU POOR, <u>POOR</u> DEAR! GIVE ME THAT BOOK!"	92
"I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU THAT MORE MEN ARE DRIVEN TO DRINK BY BAD COOKING THAN BY ANY OTHER ONE THING!"	102
"HOW DARE YOU SPEAK SO OF A LADY?"	126

**THE DISTRACTIONS
OF MARTHA**

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST CANTO OF THE DOMESTIC IDYLL

To fireside happiness, to hours of ease,
Blest with that charm—the certainty to please.

SAMUEL ROGERS.

THE Gentlemanly Principal accepted Miss Burr's resignation with conventional regret that was yet flavored with sincerity.

He was a man of routine, and never demonstrative, and a large percentage of women teachers had tendered their resignations to him in similar circumstances. But Miss Burr's methods had harmonized with his; her temper was even; her address was pleasant, and it occurred to him today, for the first time, that she was comely to look upon.

"I am sorry, really *very* sorry, that we are to lose you," he reiterated. "You have been with us a long time. Let me see! six years, isn't it?"

"Seven, Mr. Fielding," in crisp, clear accents and the careful enunciation every teacher acquires in the practice of the profession. "As long as Jacob served for Rachel."

The Distractions of Martha

The Gentlemanly Principal raised his eyebrows in an interrogative smile. "And Mr. Purcell—may I ask if *he* has stood and waited as long? Milton defines that as service, you know."

Decidedly she was pleasing to the sight, he said to himself, as a pretty flush warmed cheeks paled by the winter's drudgery.

She answered bravely enough, a prideful sparkle in the gray eyes he now saw were handsome and expressive. "Barely that number of months. But we have been friends for several years."

The Gentlemanly Principal bowed, the grave smile gallantly significant. "He has made excellent use of his time. I shall make it my business—and my pleasure—to say as much to him, and how heartily I congratulate him, when I meet and know him, as I hope you will let me do some day."

Martha Burr had risen to take her leave, the Principal rising from his chair behind his desk at her motion.

Instead of meeting his half-extended hand, she leaned slightly toward him, and spoke earnestly, quick little breaths of excitement breaking her speech into short lengths:

"I hope you will, Mr. Fielding! You may consider me very presumptuous to think of such a

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

thing, but we are to be—the marriage—a very quiet affair—is to be early in October—and I should be very happy—should esteem it a great honor—if you would give me away. You see”—hastening to quench the surprise kindled in his eyes by the unforeseen request—“I am almost alone in the world. My father died when I was a baby. You may recollect that my mother—left me three years ago?” The Principal bowed again, now in sympathizing reminiscence. “My only brother is in South America. You have been most kind to me ever since I began to teach at eighteen. I have no older friend. I hope—I believe—I shall be very happy in my new life. But at such a time, you comprehend——”

In her nervous agitation she pressed the tips of gloved fingers upon the table to steady herself. They were long, supple fingers, the russet gloves had not a wrinkle; the curve of her wrist was graceful.

The Gentlemanly Principal laid his hand upon hers in a semi-caress that was all-fatherly. “I do comprehend, my child. You have honored me by the request. Mrs. Fielding and I will be at your marriage, and I shall gladly perform the little service you ask of me. You must let us come to see you when you are settled. You will not leave New York, I hope.”

The Distractions of Martha

Her face was suddenly radiant; seriousness broke up into curves and dimples as innocently happy as the pleasure of a child. "Oh, *no!* We have taken a cottage in Budfield, and mean to go at once to housekeeping. You see"—falling unconsciously into an ingenuously confidential tone, as if sure of sympathy in what most interested herself—"neither of us has had a real home since we were mere babies. Mother and I have always *boarded!*" She lingered upon the word in fine disdain. "And Jack—Mr. Purcell, I mean"—the pale cheeks were a painful pink at the *lapsus linguæ*—"has done the same since he was fifteen years old. Home means a great deal to us. You can't know how much!"

"You like housekeeping, then? Cookery, and the rest of it?"

Her joyous confidence lured him on to the question.

"I shall *revel* in home-making, I know! Minor details,—cookery and the like—can be easily mastered. Don't misunderstand me!"—for Mr. Fielding, whose wife's reputation as an ultrafastidious housewife had never reached the teacher, had smiled knowingly. "I shall set myself seriously to work along those lines this vacation. I shall take a course of lessons in a cooking-class, and study the best manuals upon Household

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

Economies as I would study German or the higher mathematics."

"A big contract to be filled in three months!"

Martha's arch smile and saucy nod were oddly girlish, yet becoming.

"'The labor we delight in physics pain!' I am not afraid! Thank you again—and a thousand times! Good-by!"

The bride of a week reviewed the dialogue, section by section, during the swift toilet that followed her first night in the Budfield cottage. They had reached New York at six o'clock the preceding evening after a brief wedding tour, and had supper in the restaurant of the Jersey City Ferry. Refreshed in body and jubilant in spirit, they found themselves at eight o'clock upon the threshold of the neat frame cottage the plenshing of which had consumed all their spare hours since the end of the school-term.

A charwoman of indubitable reputation had been engaged to air and dust the rooms twenty-four hours prior to their arrival. When John had let themselves into the front door with the latch-key attached to a steel chain festooned in modest ostentation upon his thigh, and struck a match to light the gas in every room on the first floor, they kissed solemnly under the parlor chan-

The Distractions of Martha

delier, and each said—John huskily, Martha with a tearful tremble in her voice—“ Welcome home, darling! ”

Then Martha nestled her face against the bosom of John’s negligée shirt, and sniffed a little because it was “ all too heavenly to be true, and was John sure she wouldn’t wake up presently and find she had to begin school again tomorrow? ”

Consoled by his assurance that she was “ the most angelic goose that ever lived,” she forthwith insisted that they make the rounds of the house then and there.

They went all through it. Everything was in prime order.

Martha had spent three days out of the last week of her singlehood alone in the cottage. Her own hands had made the beds, set every room in order, hung towels in the bath-room, set the table for breakfast, even to putting the napkins by their plates, and laid the kitchen fire ready for lighting.

This was her first home-coming surprise to John, and his delighted amazement met her fullest expectations. The kitchen was the climax.

“ I never dreamed an earthly kitchen could look like this! ” said the satisfied spouse, stand-

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

ing in the middle of the floor and staring about him.

His awed admiration would have been dramatic had it been less palpably sincere. "I used to think my mother's kitchen the pleasantest place in the house—but it was not like this!"

Martha reached up to nip his ear. "'An earthly kitchen!' There'll be no cooking in Heaven, silly boy!"

"I suppose not. They'll live upon breadfruit and the like, from the tree that bears a different dish every month," said literal John. "More's the pity! I don't mean to be irreverent, but a piping-hot oyster-stew and a blood-rare steak are more tempting to a flesh-and-blood fellow. I say, little woman, I begin to see now why you are so set upon not keeping a girl."

"*Would* you mind saying 'maid,' Jack? Only country people talk of 'girls' nowadays."

"We'll compromise and call her a 'Biddy.' She'd be worse than a bull in a china-shop if she were turned loose in this—paradise!"

Martha shuddered, and with reason.

The floor was covered with tiled linoleum, gray and blue; oil-cloth of a similar design and in the same colors was tacked smoothly and evenly upon the walls; the ceiling was painted a soft gray. Behind the glass doors of a corner

The Distractions of Martha

cupboard, reaching from floor to ceiling, three upper shelves bore a modest array of blue-and-white crockery really graceful in shape. The lower shelves were furnished with bake-dishes, pots and kettles in a ware John had never seen before—some shiny gray, others blue-and-white.

“But, I say!” he uttered again, “I thought pots and kettles and frying-pans and *things!* were black—and where’s your tinware?”

“Obsolete—utterly! Nobody in this enlightened age need spoil her hands with sooty utensils. This ware is absolutely fireproof and as easily kept clean as china. Come and look at my sink!”

Dish-pans in three sizes hung above a row of large spoons, metal skewers and dish-mops. A soap-dish was flanked by a soap-shaker. At the end of the sink was a two-storied rack for dish-towels.

“Glass-towels above, pot-towels below,” explained Martha; “also graded wash-cloths. All in place, as you see, and ready for use. But I think I am more proud of the artistic construction in the grate—as the final touch—than of anything else I ever did in all my life. Look at it!”

The range was, John averred, “a picture to behold!” Shiny black, the nickel fittings like polished mirrors, and in the steel grate below,



“Glass-towels above, pot-towels below; also graded wash-cloths.”

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

first, a substratum of paper, then, finely splintered wood, a layer of larger kindlings, and above all, lumps of glossy coal.

Martha removed a lid with a lifter, pausing to show that it was a patented "cold handle," a section of wood between the metals serving as a non-conductor.

"Oh, I *say!*" interjected John helplessly. His stock of expletives was running low. "Where did you ever learn to make a fire? You might have been a stoker for seven years instead of a school-teacher."

"Never saw a fire laid in my life!" announced Martha, triumphantly, hanging the lifter back upon its appointed hook. "That structure is a work of art—the result of a process of induction. I brought Reason to bear upon the subject. Just as I see by the light of reason, unassisted by experience, that I shall save time by filling this kettle now, and setting it on the range, instead of waiting until to-morrow morning. Just as I instructed our worthy charwoman to take bread, ice, milk and cream for us today, and to see that the grocer sent in the fresh eggs I ordered by letter. Just as I reason within myself that housework, cookery included, should be directed by what the great painter said he mixed his paints with—'Brains, sir!' You see before you, Mr.

The Distractions of Martha

Purcell, an Art Kitchen! And the cook means to work upon philosophical principles. *There are my coadjutors!*”

On one side of the French clock, jauntily nibbling time away upon a shelf above the zinc-topped table, was a row of books. The bindings were protected by covers of stout gray linen bound with blue. Martha had lettered the titles upon the back in blue ink. The gray Holland window-shades had blue fringes.

“A symphony in gray and blue, in fact!” said music-loving Martha. “We degrade what should be noble when we make work homely. You should hear our cooking-class teacher on that point. She says we should look upon the kitchen as a Temple, and the range as a Shrine.”

This thought was uppermost in her mind as she entered the Temple at six o'clock that mid-October morning, and threw open the shutters to admit the pre-sunrise grayness that passed for daylight.

“How short the days are getting!” she said aloud. “We want ‘light, more light,’ as the dying Goethe said!”

The gas, flaming to meet the match, showed a happy face, a trim figure clad in dark blue gingham, a white bib-apron, and above the abundant chestnut hair a jaunty white cap with a knot

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

of blue ribbon on top. She was dressed to the part. The skirt was short enough to show a pair of exceedingly neat feet. The Common-Sense shoes had dark blue rosettes.

Every step in the task laid to her hand was clearly defined to her mind's eye.

First: Light the fire.

Second: Cut the bread for toast, not forgetting to pare off the crusts and set them aside to be dried in the oven later in the day, then crushed, and stored in a glass jar for crumbing croquettes and chops.

Third: Put the sliced bacon in the frying-pan, ready to clap on the fire five minutes before breakfast is served.

Fourth: Turn into a bowl enough Veata-Beater for "the two of us," in readiness for a three-minute visit to the oven, that should bring out the vitalizing properties of the "best brain-nerve-and-muscle food ever given to suffering humanity."

Fifth: Grind the coffee, bought in the roasted berry to avoid adulteration, and kept in a close canister to prevent loss of aroma.

Sixth: WAKE JOHN!

Seventh: Make the coffee, and leave it to drip.

Eighth: Toast the bread, and leave it in the open oven. "John likes it crisp and dry."

The Distractions of Martha

Ninth: Fry the bacon, and lay in the hot colander to drain off the fat.

Tenth: Put cream, milk and butter-balls on the table. The balls were made overnight and left in ice-water.

Eleventh: Dish breakfast.

Twelfth: CALL JOHN!

“A domestic idyll in twelve numbers!” she had said, in arranging the mental programme.

Swiftly and deftly she went through six instalments. John was still fast asleep. She threw open the windows, admitting as much of the now bleaching grayness as the room would hold. John slept on, and audibly. Not snoring, of course. To concede that would be treason. But, as he lay on his back, an arm and hand thrown over his head, queer little puffs of breath from the left corner of his mouth reminded her that the kettle downstairs might be boiling over rhythmically.

She shook him into consciousness before kissing him awake. It is only in old-fashioned poetry that lovers extract any satisfaction from osculation of sleeping beauties.

“Jack, dear! I am sorry to disturb you, but it is half-past six, and you take the 7:45, you know. Breakfast will be ready before you are. No!” soothingly, “you are not ‘a selfish pig,’

The First Canto of the Domestic Idyll

nor yet 'a sleepy-head!' I was very careful not to wake you. I couldn't have forgiven myself if you had lost a delicious morning doze. Only now you haven't a minute to lose. Nor have I!"

He smiled as he heard her fleet feet skim the stairs as a swallow the waves, and laughed outright in sheer pleasure when she broke into a carol as a swallow might twitter in the joy of flying.

"By George! She hasn't her equal in the United States of North America!" burst from his heart and lips.

The song dropped from Martha's tongue on the threshold of the artistic kitchen. A curious chill and silence greeted her there. Having touched the paper with the match, and seen a rapid red zigzag of flame dart from fold to fold, she had dismissed the fire from her mind. It was inductively laid and rationally ignited. General combustion must ensue.

Absorbed in happy retrospection, imagination bounding forward to salute a smiling future, complacent in, and confident of, the wisdom of a System based upon natural laws and cemented by eternal truths, she had never once glanced at the range.

Apparently, natural laws had been violated. There was a smell of burnt paper. She wondered

The Distractions of Martha

she had not noticed it before. A shimmer of blue haze floated breast-high through the room. The range was as cold as a Bureau of Organized Charity; the grate was lightless.

In every-day kitchen English, the fire had not kindled!

CHAPTER II

DAMPERS

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
And lea'e us nought but grief and pain
For promised joy.

BURNS.

IN dime-novel phraseology, our horrified bride fell upon her knees before the dark grate with a low cry of anguish.

By now, according to inductive reasoning, the kettle should be boiling and the oven warmed by the steady glow of the ignited coal. The brutal fact was that not all the paper had been burned, and the splintered wood was scarcely scorched. In frantic haste Martha applied another match; in extravagant desperation, a bunch of six matches. The paper caught at it readily, flickered, sighed, sent a puff of stifling smoke into her face, and blackened slowly.

The woman of thorough measures took the lids off the range with her bare hands, forgetful of the Cold Handle Lifter (patented), tore out the contents of the grate, and rebuilt the fire

The Distractions of Martha

even more inductively than before. Perhaps the superincumbent weight of the anthracite had pressed the life out of the infant sparks. She doubled the quantity of larger wood, left half of the coal out, and put in dry, fresh paper. A week in the shut-up house may have dampened the first.

As before, the blue flame met a prompt response in the paper, lost heart at the second puff, and began to smoke lamentably.

The truth dawned upon the dismayed theorist. She had heard of chimneys that would not "draw." Doctor Franklin thought them of such dignified importance as a curse to comfort that he had written an *Essay upon Smoky Chimneys*. This curse had entered paradise!

The hands of the impertinent nibbler of time upon the shelf pointed to fifteen minutes of seven, and six numbers of the domestic idyll were neither present, nor accounted for. A handsome copper chafing-dish, one of her wedding presents, stood on the sideboard in the dining-room. A bottle of alcohol was in the storeroom. A corkscrew was one of the might-be-needed kitchen properties. Five minutes more had been nibbled off and dropped into eternity past when she brought the three utensils together upon the zinc-topped table and filled the lamp. In ten minutes

Dampers

she must toast the bread, make the coffee and fry the bacon. The Veata-Beater could be eaten cold at a pinch, and this was a pinch.

The chafing-dish was the best of its kind, but, confronted with the demand to toast, fry and boil at one and the same time, it was found wanting. Martha was well-read in fiction, as in philosophy. Leslie Goldthwaite's immortal maxim, "*Something must be crowded out,*" held an honorable place among quotable, because practical, aphorisms. The pinch crowded out the toast on the spot. John must have his coffee, though the sky fell. She filled the deepest of the saucepans appertaining unto the chafing-dish with water, and set it over the burner. While it was in heating, she set a dish of oranges on the breakfast-table, the cold bread (this with a pang), the butter, cream and the glass bowl of Veata-Beater.

Then—having not one atom of superstition in her make-up—she went back to the kitchen to watch for the boiling of the pot. In five minutes it should have reached the point of ebullition. Whereas, as if it had caught the spirit of the recalcitrant fire, at the end of eight minutes a low-spirited simmer had just begun to crimp the outer edges.

At this instant the woman of rational re-

The Distractions of Martha

sources thought of one. Since the bacon was knocked out of the running by the abnormal sloth of the water, she would boil two eggs in the same liquid that was to make the coffee. If washed clean, the shells would not harm the beverage without which she had heard John declare that he could not live and work through the day. Wrapped in a hot napkin, they would neither chill nor harden while the coffee percolated and dripped.

She cleansed the eggs in two waters, wiped them dry, and dropped them into the now heaving water. No. 1 reached the bottom in safety. No. 2 struck between its predecessor and the side of the saucepan, and cracked across.

One part of the wit that goes to the boiling of eggs is to slide them into the water from the tip of a tablespoon. This is one of the thousand-and-ten things everybody is expected to know. Consequently, it was not spoken of in the cooking-class. A grayish film coated the surface of the agitated water; yellowish nebulae slowly spread themselves below it.

Martha snatched at the saucepan with her naked hand. It burned her fiercely, and she let go before it quite reached the table. Striking on the edge of the bottom, the vessel careened and went over.

Dampers

John entering, clean-shaven, smiling, buoyantly expectant, in his natty business suit, worn today for the first time, was just in season to get a dash of the murky geyser upon his trousers. The up-to-now whole egg, in its rebound from the linoleum, crashed with full force against the toe of a glossy boot.

The Apostle of System, Philosophy and Resource burst into tears as hot and heavy as the hysterical weeping of the weakest of her sex. The one possible palliation of the catastrophe would have lain in the saving sense of humor which has kept many a woman out of the lunatic asylum, and this our heroine did not possess. Even John's anathemas of the rascally fraud of a range and the maker and patentee thereof brought no light to her darkness. When the chief sufferer from the mischances of the morning—and who, luckily for him, could discern the funny side of a case when there was one in sight—told her over his large cold orange, cold bread, cold Veata-Beater, and glass of cold milk, that he "had not expected to get into hot water so early in married life," and compared the scene revealed by the opening of the kitchen door to Marius among the ruins of Carthage, she could not force a smile.

"I wish I could stay to help you out of the

The Distractions of Martha

scrape, little girl!" said John, with his good-by kiss. "Telephone for a plumber or a mason—or somebody—and have that beastly humbug overhauled right away. I wouldn't have had you so worried and upset for ten times the worth of the infernal machine. As for me, I've had a tip-top breakfast. The sight of you at the head of your own table—and *mine!*—did me more good than a Delmonico-Hoffman-Waldorf-Astoria breakfast would have done. Keep up a brave heart, pet! All's well that ends well."

Martha took the chill from the suds in which she washed the breakfast-things by a quart of water heated over the lamp of the chafing-dish. Of course, no hot water was to be had from the boiler, in the absence of a range-fire. When she had set the kitchen to rights, she looked drearily about her, wondering at the change wrought in the place and in life within twelve hours by circumstances so ignoble as a fire that would not burn, water that would not boil, and a quart-kettle that turned over.

That John had gone to business on their first morning in their own home with never a warm bit or sup, seemed to her a disappointment she could never get over—a mortification that must abide with her for ever.

She called up the plumber, and received a

Dampers

promise that he "would be along soon's he could get through with other jobs."

Words and tone were merely those indigenious to the soil that grows the suburban mechanic, but they were another thorn-prick.

Her menu for the day was prearranged in her provident mind, and her market-memoranda were made out. She had written them down and computed the cost of each item, week before last—the day but one before she was married—in a substantial leather-bound book lettered "HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES."

At nine o'clock she was ready to sally forth, and re-read the carefully prepared menu to refresh a memory that seldom played her false :

DINNER

(No. 1)

Raw Oysters

Soup (Mock Turtle?)

Roast Beef

Sweet Potatoes

Green-Corn Fritters

Lettuce Salad

Cream Cheese and Crackers

Floating Island

Coffee

"No frills," as John would say. A substantial family dinner befitting the means of two young people with an income of two thousand five

The Distractions of Martha

hundred dollars per annum, and eminently satisfactory in the reading.

John doted upon roast beef, and sweet potatoes went well with it. Green-corn fritters were also a favorite weakness with him, and she had seen his eyes grow dreamy and wistful sometimes in alluding to the floating islands his mother used to make for his Sunday dinner. Martha had taken copious and circumstantial notes of recipes of each and all of the above-named dishes as they were dressed upon the platform by the professorin who likened the range to a Shrine. The wife had no misgiving as to her ability to prepare the delicacy if the fire were once made to burn upon the now cold and darkling Altar.

She called up the plumber again, and strove to exact a pledge that he would come to her as early as eleven o'clock. She could lunch on crackers and cheese and an apple. But John ought, and must, and should, have a dinner that would drive far from him the memory of the breakfast he did not eat. The sole result of her pleadings was a half-engagement to "try to look in somewheres about noon."

"Too late to make anything but a cream soup!" reflected the youthful caterer, ruefully. "And I had set my heart upon mock turtle!"

Dampers

Never mind! I'll get a calf's head, and cook it in time to have it ready for to-morrow. John prefers it to any other."

The suburban butcher had "no head in stock." He could telephone to the city for it, and deliver it that evening, "if that would suit Mrs.—"

"Purcell!" supplied Martha glibly, at his interrogative pause, with the elaborate unconcern assumed by young matrons before their new names fit easily upon them, "231 Elderberry Avenue, corner of Hackmetack Street. We have removed lately to Budfield from New York. If we are satisfied with the manner in which you serve us, we shall probably become regular customers. Your place is very convenient to us."

"I hope Mrs. Purcell will have no occasion to complain of us!" smirked the obsequious knight of the cleaver over an expanse of bib-apron that fitted his roly-poliness as the skin fits a sausage. "Now, what can I show her that we *have* in stock? Poultry—lamb, very choice—beef, ah, yes!" at an affirmative gesture.

"A prime roast!" ordered Martha. The cook-book phrase would have betrayed inexperience if glibness and unconcern had not written "just married!" all over her for the vender's practised eye. "Rib-roast. About five pounds in weight

The Distractions of Martha

—net. And the trimmings to be sent home with it.”

She had not taken two lessons in “How, When and Where to Purchase” for nothing.

The rubicund tradesman pursed a doubting mouth and shook a more than doubting head. “Two ribs are the very least we recommend a lady to buy. One would make a ridiculously small roast, hardly thicker than a steak, in point of fact, when trimmed. It really would not pay Mrs. Purcell’s cook to cook it. It would dry up into nothing.”

“I am my own cook,” said Martha, flushing with consciousness of moral courage in avowing it to so ornate a personage. “Let it be two ribs, then. Fortunately I know what to do with the left-overs.”

“Certainly, Mrs. Purcell, certainly! In that Mrs. Purcell is unlike many ladies in whose kitchens more is thrown away than is eaten by the family. There is the advantage of a lady being her own manager. Nothing is wasted. It is easy to see from the way Mrs. Purcell gives her orders what sort of manager she is. One of the kind spoken of in the Gospels, whose heart of a husband doth safely trust in her.”

All the while he was shaping and shaving the “prime roast.”

Dampers

“Eight pounds, net!” he uttered, when the job was done to his satisfaction. “Would not Mrs. Purcell prefer to have the bones taken out, and the roast skewered into a round? The best judge of roasts mostly like it that way. It looks far handsomer when cooked.”

Mrs. Purcell’s esthetic sense did not affect the ungainly rib-roast. It looked, as she told John afterward, “sprawling and leggy, with those two naked bones protruding from the red meat.”

The long, lithe blade slashed beneath and above the legginess; the bones were withdrawn and tossed upon a heap of others, the meat was curled up compactly and skewered, the artist dealing it a complacent slap with the broad flat of his palm.

“Ain’t it a picture? Mr. Purcell will say he has never seen a tastier dish, nor set teeth into a jucier and tenderer. Charge, I hope, Mrs. Purcell?”

“By no means!” Martha took out her purse with the dignity of a cash customer. “We contract no bills! How much is it?”

“Eight pounds at twenty-two cents *per*—just one, seventy-six, Mrs. Purcell.”

“But that was before you took out the bones.”

The honest vender smiled, patronizingly supe-

The Distractions of Martha

rior to the novice. His shrug was deprecatory and explanatory:

“That’s always done, Mrs. Purcell. We buy the animal with the bones in. Dead loss to us, those bones. But what can a man do? The ‘critters’ are built that way.”

Evidently her injunction as to the trimmings had slipped his godlike mind, as it had Martha’s. Yet she had taken full notes of an exhaustive disquisition upon the value of the stock-pot. The man’s reasoning seemed cogent. The consumer should share the merchant’s loss. Political economy and philanthropy agreed upon that. She paid the bill, but with a secret qualm. Her dinner, according to her calculations based upon “The Science of Marketing Complete in Three Lessons,” was to cost but two dollars in all. The something to be crowded out would be the raw oysters. They might be classed as frills to a family dinner, after all. John wouldn’t mind, especially as the menu was her secret, shared by none.

She winced again at finding sweet potatoes were a dollar a bushel. The purchase of less than half a bushel did not present itself to her analytical imagination. The coveted “sweets” joined the ranks of “Crowded Outs.” Green corn was what to the experienced marketer would have

Dampers

seemed ominously cheap. A dime bought a dozen ears, which were a trifle wilted and sere as to the husks, but since the grains were to be grated from the cob, absolute freshness was not a *sine qua non*. Half a dozen eggs swallowed up the rest of the two dollars. The floating island must be a baked custard. She could not afford a sponge-cake for a foundation. Nor—and the qualm here was a pang—a can of tomatoes for the cream soup she had planned. As for the salad and cream cheese—they were another “frill.” She was sure John would agree with her that they would better begin as they meant to keep on.

Like many another John, this particular Benedict was fast falling into line with Mr. Jorkins of Dickensian fame.

She hurried home at ten o'clock, lest the plumber might be there before her. Of course he was not. Nor had he come when she ate a slice of bread and butter, and washed it down with a glass of water at lunch-time. She had been self-accredited for seven years with a stock of patience adequate to any force the enemy of tender years could bring against her.

By one o'clock she had ceased to keep up to her miserable self the fiction of philosophical attendance upon fate. She flitted up and down-stairs, to the back windows commanding Hack-

The Distractions of Martha

metack Street, to the front looking down the maple-shaded vista of Elderberry Avenue, lingering oftenest and longest in the gray-and-blue kitchen, fascinated against her will by the silent nightmare of a range, shining black and stone-cold.

She was meditating a pusillanimous telephone to John, offering to meet him in the ferry-house and dine with him there, since nothing could be cooked at home, when the jangle of the door-bell produced a concussion of every joint of her vertebræ, and sent her flying down the stairs.

It was the plumber—red-faced, shock-haired, shirt-sleeved, and tart-tongued at the persistence of her summons. She could have fallen at his feet and clasped his baggy knees at the excess of relief and gratitude. Gasping out disjointed fragments of explanation, she led the way to the Temple, and indicated the Shrine with a tragic sweep of the arm.

The fire had been relaid artistically. The benefactor grunted, extracted a match from the pocket of his breeches, and was in the act of striking it upon the seat of the same, when something arrested eye and hand.

“Gee-whizz!” he growled. Then his eyes—small, and beery—travelled up the pipes at the back of the stove, and he said “By gum!”



"I'll be gormed if I don't believe you ain't thought to open one on 'em."

Dampers

He jerked savagely at two mysterious iron loops above the oven door. Martha saw them now for the first time. Next he gave a twist as savage to two other loops in the smoke-pipes, rose to his feet, and glowered grinningly at the confused housewife.

“I’ll be gormed if I don’t believe you ain’t thought to open one on ’em! How could any Christyun fire do anything *but* go out when every blessed dra-a-ft is shet, an’ nary a damper open? Put it to yerself how long you’d draw the breath o’ life if yer mouth an’ yer nose was stopped up tight. It beats the Jews how ignorant folks *ken* be!”

CHAPTER III

A "TOPPED AND TAILED" DINNER

Talk of haircloth shirts and scourgings, and sleeping on ashes, as means of saintship! There is no need of them in our country. Let a woman once look at her domestic trials as her haircloth, her ashes, her scourges—accept them, rejoice in them, smile and be quiet, silent, patient and loving under them—and the convent can teach her no more; she is a victorious saint!

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE.

At four o'clock John Purcell had a telephone call. The voice at the Budfield end was blithe.

"Is that you, Jack? I couldn't resist the temptation to tell you that the plumber has been in and that the range is all right. The fire is burning be-yu-tifully! And I'm as happy as a queen, and busy as a hiveful of bees."

"Good for you, little girl! You're a brick! I shall bring home an A No. 1 appetite for dinner. Only—don't overwork yourself! How's the poor burnt hand?"

"Almost well, thank you. I sha'n't think of it now that that wrongheaded range has come to its senses. Good-by!"

"He'll never think to ask what the matter was with it!" she reflected, shrewdly, in hanging up

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

the transmitter. "I know it's cowardly, but I would rather he knew nothing of it just yet. One comfort is he has never heard of a draught or a damper any more than I had. A bad beginning may make a good ending. Now for the busiest three hours of a busy life!"

She set the table before attacking the heaviest part of the task. Had she ever helped prepare gooseberries for jam or jelly, she might have bethought herself to call hers a "topped and tailed" feast. Always supposing she had possessed the saving sense of humor, of which, as I have said, she was totally destitute—more's the pity!

The beef—now emphatically the *pièce de résistance*—was shapely, even to her unaccustomed eyes. It was moist and ruddy and mottled artistically with snowy suet. Recollecting the abstracted ribs, she weighed it. The poetical professorin was sternly practical in recommending each pupil to include a pair of accurate scales among her kitchen effects.

"Six pounds, scant weight. That means forty-four cents thrown away. I call it *iniquitous!*"

There was no time for nursing righteous wrath. She took down the fattest of her plump coadjutors. The truth had flashed upon her that she had never seen a piece of beef roasted. How

The Distractions of Martha

could it be done in cooking-lessons just sixty minutes long? Omelets, salads, timbales, chicken *au suprême*, breaded chops, broiled birds and steaks—*mignon*, Châteaubriand, *à la jardinière*, with onions, with mushrooms, with Béarnaise sauce, *au naturel*—oysters in twenty various ways, *entrées* innumerable, and desserts by the score, had been concocted in her sight, and the *modus operandi* punctiliously transcribed in her note-book. The coarser and more tedious processes of cookery were slurred over, as was inevitable. A professor whose terms were one dollar an hour for each pupil, could not boil a leg of mutton or roast a turkey as an object-lesson any more reasonably than she could waste time preparing vegetables. The former must be taken for granted; the vegetables must be laid to her hand ready for instant use. To expect anything else was like demanding instruction in the multiplication table and simple division from a professor in higher mathematics. Rudiments are a foregone conclusion.

And what need, when Madame Romaine had prepared and published, and a majority of her disciples had paid for (discount of twenty per cent. for teachers), "THE PERFECT FLOWER OF COOKERY," six hundred and eighty petals strong, bound in a calyx of washable morocco,

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

and illustrated so bountifully and gorgeously, that, as more than one mother testified, "children cried for it"?

"Armed with this incomparable Manual, an intelligent child of ten may with ease prepare a banquet fit for the gods—a veritable Feast of Lucullus."

Thus the advertisement that heralded the advent of the Daniel Lambert of cook-books.

Martha turned the leaves until she alighted upon "*Weights and Measures.*"

"BEEF:—To roast—rare, eight to ten minutes per pound."

"I am sure John likes it rare!" meditated the wife, her head tipped thoughtfully toward the left shoulder. "Ten minutes for each pound. That would be just one hour. I'll put it in at six o'clock. Meanwhile, I'll make the fritters."

She looked to her marching-orders:

"Two cupfuls of grated sweet-corn, or the same of canned, chopped fine. Beat together two eggs, two teaspoonfuls of melted butter and half a pint of milk. Stir in the corn, salt to taste, add flour at discretion, and drop by the great spoonful into deep, hot fat. Drain, and serve."

"First, grate your corn," uttered Martha, reminiscent of Mrs. Glasse and the hare.

She hummed a merry tune in beginning the

The Distractions of Martha

easy task. The cheap corn was tough, the withered grains yielding reluctantly to the grater. She laid to it more muscle, tearing down well into the cob. The dozen ears panned out two cupfuls of damp chaff. She set it aside, cleared away the débris, washed her hands, and forged onward.

“Next, melt the butter!”

Set upon the range, by now roaring and red-hot, the butter turned black while she was breaking the eggs into a bowl. A second supply was watched during the minute that changed it to oil. She poured it upon the eggs, added the milk and salt, and put in the revolving egg-beater.

One energetic whirl splattered the mixture into her face. She manipulated it more carefully after that; still it slopped over occasionally. Surely a quart bowl must be large enough for the mixing (she said, “the incorporation”)—of half a pint of milk, two tablespoonfuls of butter and a couple of eggs.

In the very teeth of calm Reason, as the compound foamed, it dashed over the brim. It would quiet down when the corn went in. It was sedate enough when flour at discretion was added. There was so much of the paste presently that she wisely transferred it to another bowl. The final vigorous stir was given at five

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

minutes of six. Being a novice, she had taken three times as long in the task as was necessary. Practice would give her speed.

The song thrilled forth again as she advanced upon the *pièce de résistance*. It died abruptly in the middle of a bar.

"If you roast in the oven—" began the "P. F. of C."

Where else, in the name of all that was feasible and commonsensible, could she roast it? A wild idea that it might be cooked upon the red plates of the Shrine assailed her, and was dismissed as preposterous. The meat should be cooked in the oven, willy-nilly.

In what receptacle? was the next query. Reading over the formula carefully, she came upon a dark allusion to a dripping-pan.

At her pupil's request, Madame Romaine had drawn up and given to her, with her blessing, a list of kitchen "must-bes" and "may-haves." Martha's pot-closet was fitted up in strict conformity to this list. She knew each article by name and by sight, and some by touch. She did not identify the title of dripping-pan with any one of them. She drew, almost at random, upon her stores, and hit upon a biscuit-tin. The beef went into it, after the doubt as to whether it should lie on the side or back was dispelled by

The Distractions of Martha

reference to a colored cut of "Roast Beef," face uppermost.

"*Don't wash it!*" was an emphatic clause in the code of directions. Otherwise, she would have soaked it, to get rid of the gory look.

"Dash a small cupful of boiling water over it when ready for roasting, to cicatrize it and retain the juices." She had none ready. A low growl from the boiler reminded her that it was getting hot. The small cup was filled from the faucet. It smoked satisfactorily in running over the embryonic roast.

"*Dredge with flour.*" Time was flying. Unable to lay her hand at once upon a dredger, albeit she knew there was such a thing upon her list, she sprinkled a handful of flour over the raw surface, sufficient in quantity to make a biscuit or two.

She put the biscuit-tin, in which the roast was a close fit, into the oven, and shut the door.

"Cook fast for ten minutes or so," was the next marching-order. "Then, slacken the heat."

The temperature of the oven was low, although the fire was red and roaring; all the draughts and dampers were wide open, as the disdainful range-doctor had left them.

She read on:

"An infallible test of baking and braising heat

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

is to hold the bare arm in the oven. If the heat do not become unbearable while you can count twenty, you may safely commit bread, cake, pudding or roast to the tender mercies of the oven."

Martha stripped her short sleeve to the shoulder, and plunged her arm into the dark cavern. When she had counted fifty she was entirely comfortable. At seventy-five she could still hold her arm in place above the dredged roast. Closing the door, she made test of the other oven, counting one hundred slowly while the bare arm was extended to the back of the oven.

She slammed the second door, and stood upright, staring at the enigmatical Shrine, her forehead puckered, her heart thumping painfully. Her professor and "The Perfect Flower of Cookery" made prodigal use of the terms, "a quick oven," "a moderate oven," "a slow oven," "a steady heat." How to accelerate, moderate or retard was a professional secret she had not divined.

"Tickety-tick! nibble-nibble!" went the impatient clock. She would do the duty that lay nearest her hand. That assuredly was the custard. A boiled custard it would better be, in view of the unknown quantities and qualities of the oven. She consulted the index:

"CUSTARD—boiled, plain—Page 378."

The Distractions of Martha

“ Four eggs. Four tablespoonfuls of sugar—granulated. Vanilla or other flavoring extract—one teaspoonful. One quart of fresh milk.”

“ *Great heavens!* ”

Martha sat down suddenly. “ The Perfect Flower of Cookery,” grown all at once too heavy for her hand, fell to the floor, where it lay upon its back, the leaves spreading widely and idiotically.

There was not a drop of milk in the house! The last of the quart left in the morning had gone into the fritters. She had forgotten until this minute that John had drunk two glasses and she one. She might telephone to the grocery six blocks away, but it could not be there in time. She could not “ run around ” for it, as a mechanic’s wife might. She was not dressed for the street, and she could not leave the dinner. For a dessert John must, for once, be content with sweet wafers. She had laid in two boxes for the afternoon teas that were to give airy grace to her modest “ entertaining.”

She picked up the prostrate “ P. F. of C.,” and turned again to “ BEEF:—To roast.”

“ Then, slacken the heat.” (That was palpably needless.) “ Baste every ten minutes with the generous juices that ooze from the hot meat.”

Martha peeped into the darksome interior.

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

The beef loomed up like a snowball in the half-light. She touched it. It was hardly lukewarm under the dry flour.

"As sure as I live, I'll put it into a frying-pan if it doesn't brown in half an hour!" cried the woman of method, in irrational desperation. "While I am waiting I'll fry the fritters. I've seen that done often enough to rise superior to circumstance!"

She fetched forth a deep saucepan, filled it half-way to the top with lard, and set it at the side of the range to heat gradually. In ten minutes it began to hiss. The top of the range was hot at least, if not the ovens. A kettle of water was boiling vociferously, and the boiler over the sink gurgled spasmodically, as if it had wind on the stomach. She brought the saucepan to the front, and prepared "to drop the corn mixture by the great spoonful into deep, hot fat." The fat was deep; the fat was hot. It began to hiss and bubble and splutter upon the red plate of the range. She dug the great spoon into the stiff dough.

It had surely thickened since she stirred in flour "at discretion!" Extricating a spoonful from the gluey mass she tried to drop it. It stuck fast and hard. She shook the spoon. The contents fell heavily into the saucepan. A jet

The Distractions of Martha

of scalding fat shot upward and spread outward. That which reached the range blazed up with an evil glare. The spray that touched her bare arm stung and scorched like a tongue of flame. When she could see for the water pain drove to her eyes, the deep fat was boiling to within an inch of the top of the saucepan, noisily and angrily, the shapeless fritter bobbing up and down in it, and both were as black as coal. The Art Kitchen was full of the smoke and stench of burning grease. Wrapping her hand in a dish-cloth, she seized the infernal thing and carried it to the sink. There she poured out the pitchy horror.

Next morning the coagulated fat had choked up the escape-pipe. She did not think of that danger in her distress. If she had thought of it, there was nothing else to be done.

Ten minutes thereafter, having covered the burn with baking-soda and bound up her arm, she heroically took another look at the *pièce de résistance*, now indeed worthy of the distinction. The biscuit-pan was quite hot, and odors, faint but goodly, stole from the meat. There were, as yet, no generous juices, and the flour on the top was still virgin white. She could hold the uninjured arm in the oven while she counted eighty. She stopped there.

The hateful clock had nibbled the hour down

A "Topped and Tailed" Dinner

to twenty minutes. She had laid out a white muslin frock on the bed upstairs ready to be slipped on in half a minute when she should hear the whistle of John's train. This accomplished, she would trip gayly down the stairs to dish dinner ready for serving by the time her lover-husband got to the foot of the porch steps. The meeting, just within the vestibule, screened by vines from prying eyes across the way, would be to the domestic idyll in ten parts what the bunch of late roses she had gathered from their own yard was to the table set out with the Fieldings' wedding-gift—a Limoges dinner-set.

She took in each forlorn feature of her failure at one swift glance—the raw dough that was like untempered mortar; the blackened saucepan and greasy sink; the red-hot range with the lukewarm heart.

Then—I record it with honest satisfaction and to the credit of the heroine whom, I fear, the reader is ready to regard as but a poor and weak pretender—her fighting blood arose to her help.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN HAS A NOTION

Up! let's trudge another mile!

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

JOHN PURCELL had lunched upon a sandwich and a cup of coffee. For one thing, it was the beginning of his busy season, and work had accumulated mountain-high while he was off upon his wedding-trip. By taking this frugal meal at his desk, he saved half an hour's time. His main motive in making it frugal was the recollection of a talk upon ways and means Martha had held with him yesterday.

"We must look out for the little leaks, the tiny economies," moralized that excellent helpmeet. "That doesn't mean petty saving and scrimping, by any means. Real economy has a dignity of its own. Madame Romaine—our Culinary Professor, you know—never tired of harping upon that string. She illustrated it by a series of economical *entrées* one week. It is amazing how much can be saved and utilized to advantage in a household where every one has a system of

John Has a Notion

never spending a dollar when a quarter can be made to do as well."

John paid twenty cents for coffee and sandwich.

He called the sum "an inside price" to himself, chuckling while he swallowed it. There was a good deal of his anatomy, all told—six feet in one direction—and the twenty cents' worth of sustenance did not go far toward filling him up. He was rather glad of his canine hunger as he jumped from the train at ten minutes after seven. There had been a detention on the line that lost a quarter of an hour. Glad, because he could do more and unfeigned justice to the tiptop dinner his jewel of a wife would have ready for him.

"Somehow or other, I've a notion that she'll have roast beef to-night," he ruminated in the rapid walk that made him happier and hungrier at every step. "It may be instinct, or telepathy—or maybe because I know *she* knows what I like in that line. And if ever there was a husband-spoiler, that blessed little girl of mine is one. I'm the luckiest dog alive!"

He took the three steps of the veranda at a bound, and let himself into the house. An odor that was not the wooing exhalation of roast beef hung in the air. He knew it, and mentally classi-

The Distractions of Martha

fied it as the "boarding-house smell." It was really the impression left upon the air by scorched fat when the smell had cooled off. Involuntarily, John resented the association of it with his newly made paradise. Loyally putting down the feeling, he called,—“Little girl! Patty! Sweet-heart!”

There was a swift patter of heels upon the floor overhead, a rush and swish of draperies on the stairs, and the representative of the three pet names was in his arms. Panting and flushed from speed or excitement, she put up a smiling mouth to kiss him. She had on the white gown, one of the late roses was in her belt, and the flavor of cold calcined fat was in her hair. John was a practical man, but he had ideals, and one sustained a faint but distinct shock as he noticed the "boarding-house smell" he hoped he had left behind him forever. He fought it as he would have "downed" a sin.

"A bit late!" he said, blithely. "No motive for it except a locomotive. Have I damaged dinner?"

"Not in the least!" She would not let the words stick in her throat. "In fact, things are a little behindhand at this end of the line. Run up and get rid of business dust. You'll find me in the dining-room when you come down."

John Has a Notion

He found the chafing-dish there also. As he entered, his wife turned an omelet out of it upon a hot dish. It stuck in the middle and at both ends, refusing obstinately to fold over, landing in a discomfited heap at one side of the platter. Martha bit her lip.

“ ‘The total depravity of inanimate things!’ ” she quoted. “ Luckily, breakages won’t affect the taste. It’s a cheese omelet, my dear boy! I recollect your calling for one, the first restaurant supper we ever took together. Sit down—please! You must know that while the fire burns furiously in the range-grate, the ovens are so slow that the beef I put into the hotter of the two won’t be done before midnight.”

“ Ah, I was thinking you’ll recollect my liking for roast beef! ” struck in John from his end of the table.

He had taken up the carving-knife, and was whetting it mechanically. Somehow, the action had pathos in it for the wife. She plunged ahead, valiantly:

“ So, as I knew my poor darling would not wait that long for his dinner, I thought I’d toss up an omelet, and make a cup of strong coffee for him. Do you know, those roses grew on one of our very own bushes? I discovered it in a corner of the yard. There’s a row of chrysan-

The Distractions of Martha

themums there, too, all in full bud, that will keep us in flowers for the table until frost kills them."

"Indeed!" said John, pluckily, albeit absent-minded. "That's capital!"

"I'm rather ashamed of the toast!" regretted Martha. "It caught a little on the edges. But the top of that evil-minded range is red-hot. Help yourself to fried potatoes!"

"That's bully!" quoth John, shovelling some into his plate. They rattled drearily in his ears. He thought of dead leaves.

Martha hoped he might think that she had cooked them. Whereas, he knew the cut and taste of Saratoga chips as well as if he had seen her turn them into the frying-pan out of a whitey-brown paper bag, and shake them frantically over the oft-mentioned red-hot range, the minute the grocer's boy, obedient to a "rush order" by telephone, had handed them in at the back door.

The coffee was drinkable—barely—yet really not so bad for a first attempt in a new black-tin pot that had not been previously seasoned by half a day's simmer on the side of the stove. The omelet was bitter in spots, with the peculiar nauseating bitterness of burned eggs. John ate a double portion of it, and kicked himself in imagination for recalling a story he had heard his landlady tell of an "airish" Hibernian, but "six

John Has a Notion

months in the country," who complained to her mistress, after devouring six eggs for breakfast, that "the mate corner of her stomach wasn't full." He took a second cup of coffee, getting the dregs of the pot in it, and put the spoon in the saucer with the obvious expression of one who waited for the next course.

Martha pushed a plate of vanilla wafers toward him—a species of pseudo-sweet for which he chanced to have a special aversion, considering it as nothing more than desiccated mucilage, sweetened and stamped in a crisscross pattern. As he crunched one between his teeth, his wife remarked, with the heroic sprightliness she had maintained throughout the repast,—“Blame the oven, not me, for the lack of a better dessert. I had meditated a lovely baked custard.”

“I say!” bolting the wretched remnant of the mucilaginous mockery with an effort, “I’ve a great mind to interview that rascally range when I’ve done—*supper!*”

The palpable hesitation in putting a name to the phantom of a meal went to the listener’s soul.

“You see, Patty— If you’ve finished supper, maybe you won’t mind if I light a cigar? Thank you!”

With an air of one who salutes a familiar

The Distractions of Martha

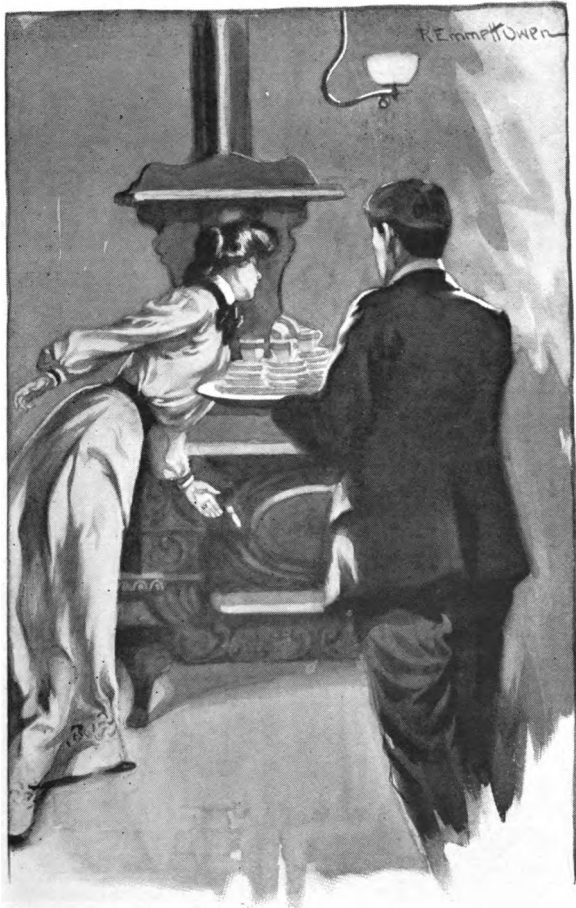
friend in a strange land, he pulled lovingly upon the lighted weed for twenty seconds or thereabouts, before resuming speech.

“You see, I happened this morning to mention to Sam Fair, who goes down on my train, that you were having the dickens of a time with your range, and he put me next to a fact or two about cooking-stoves and such. Did the plumber examine the draughts and dampers and all that?”

“Yes,” rejoined Martha, faintly, beginning to collect plates and cups preparatory to washing them. “They are all right.”

“Hm-m-m! I had a notion the trouble might be *there*. Sam is quite a draughtsman in an amateur way, with a genius for mechanics. He did it all out for me on paper, and made it so plain I could almost run a range myself. I guess”—pushing his chair back—“since you have got to be there anyway, I’ll go into the kitchen and tackle your enemy. Here! Give me that tray! You don’t suppose I’m going to let you carry it!”

The fire in the grate was still red and it still roared. Martha had fed it with two scuttlefuls of coal that afternoon. Preceding her husband she threw open the oven door with dramatic effect. The floury top-dressing was coloring in patches in absorbing “generous juices.” As



She threw open the oven door with dramatic effect.

John Has a Notion

much of the meat as was still visible below what looked like a rakish nightcap, was of a sickly russet.

John sniffed audibly, stooping to look into the cave. "Smells good, and very natural. How long ought it to cook?"

A wild hope caused the "meat corner" to throb yearningly.

"If one would have it rare, from eight to ten minutes a pound," recited Martha. "That piece of meat weighs six pounds. It has been in the oven for two hours. And I can bear my naked arm in there while I could count—a *thousand!* Oh, Jack! I meant to have such a delicious dinner for you! And to be foiled by that—mindless mass of metal!"—alliterative from force of habit. "I *can't* bear it!"

She seldom cried, but nerves and tears had been having their way all day, and had left the conduits open.

"Don't give way, sweetheart! There'll be hundreds of days when everything will go straight—in spite of this dirty *devil!*"

He raised a foot, and deliberately dealt the alliterative offending cause a kick.

Martha laughed hysterically. "How silly you are!"

But she felt better for the outbreak of indig-

The Distractions of Martha

nant sympathy. His next movement was to draw up a chair and seat himself in front of the enemy.

“We’ll fight it out on this line if it takes all summer, you despicable destroyer of domestic peace!”

He pulled a folded paper from his vest-pocket, and studied it for a long minute.

“By George!” he cried, so sharply that Martha let a soap-shaker fall into the water she was churning into suds. “That fellow in the stove-pipe ought to be turned crossways, and it’s straight up and down! And so’s the one in the other pipe. All the heat is going up the chimney. And those two scamps directly over the ovens should be pushed in, instead of being drawn out to their full length!”

He jumped up, and, in his own lingo, “went for them,” as much excited as if he had struck oil. Then he reseated himself and set a watch. Martha was grateful for anything that promised solution of her perplexity, and a new sensation was stealing into her analytical mind. Her husband would make himself master of a situation that had baffled her. Was she to be outgeneralled on her own ground?

“I say, Patty!” called John presently, pulling open the oven door, “bring that nude arm

John Has a Notion

of yours along here, and test the humor of this party!"

Before she could wipe her hands from the dish-water, she heard the hiss, and scented the breath of hot meat.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven!" she counted, her arm over the smoking roast. "*Ugh!*" She jerked it out.

"Hot—at last—eh?" chuckled John. "We've solved the mystery. I say! I'm going to eat some of that beef before I sleep. I am hungry enough to bolt an ox and pick my teeth with his horns. Let the good work go on!"

Martha caught his hand as he was about to slam the oven door. "It ought to be basted!"

"Eh!" stared John, dropping his jaw.

"Basted!" she repeated, again rising superior to the novice. "Madame Romaine told us a funny story of a woman—a married woman—who thought basting must involve the use of needle and thread. Now, look and learn!"

She scooped up a scant spoonful of "generous juice," and poured it upon the blackening biscuit on top of the roast. It hissed and was sucked up before it could trickle to the exposed sides of the meat. A second spoonful shared the same fate. There was barely enough liquid for

The Distractions of Martha

a third, but it followed the others. Martha closed the oven and finished washing plates and cups. When she had carried them to the dining-room, another fifteen minutes had gone. The basting was to be repeated at the end of a quarter of an hour, should the meat be cooking fast.

John smacked his lips expectantly on seeing her approach, spoon in hand. He shut them tightly to keep in an exclamation of dismay at the smoke and smell which rushed from the opened throat of the oven. The "biscuit" had burned to a cindery crust; the generous juices were evaporating so fast that they glazed the bottom of the pan.

"It must be done!" decided husband and wife in a breath.

John pushed Martha aside, laid hold of the pan, let it go with an ejaculation more hot than holy, and danced about the floor with three fingers and a thumb in his mouth, while the intrepid cook wrapped her hand in a damp towel, extricated pan and meat from the torrid zone, and transported it to the temperate region of the zinc-topped table.

She left it there, smoking like a sacrificial altar, while she bound up John's blisters with linseed-oil and lime-water.

"How happened you to have it so handy?"

John Has a Notion

queried he, relaxing his contorted features when the pain abated.

“I bought a bottle this forenoon while I was out.”

The white gown was long-sleeved, and the chain of red spots where the hot fat had sprayed her arm showed through but indistinctly.

“Provident little woman!” said admiring John. Then—“Now, I say—I’m going to have a hack at that beef, if only to get the better of it. We’ll have a lark, and eat it out here. Your kitchen is prettier than most people’s parlors. Get plates and things while I go for the carver. Ha! minion! I will have my revenge!” shaking his fist at the “prime roast.”

One slash struck off the blackened nightcap, revealing a pale, sodden surface. A second cut laid bare a purple heart just warmed through, reddish circles about it shading into a charred rim. The beef was raw in the middle; the outside was done to a crisp.

Stout-hearted John held to his purpose of eating a slice of it. Martha, sick in soul and jaded in body, got bread and butter, pepper, salt, mustard and pickles, and would brew him a glass of tea-punch. She further humored him by letting him lay a slice of the roast upon her plate, and forced herself to swallow a few morsels.

The Distractions of Martha

Even John could not pretend to like what she characterized to herself as the "forlorn hope of the Might-have-been."

It was hopelessly unpalatable—a fitting climax to a Day of Disasters—the first day's work in her Art Kitchen.



It was hopelessly unpalatable—a fitting climax to a Day of Disasters.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT MAY BE DONE WITH A CALF'S HEAD

There is such a choice of difficulties that I own myself at a loss how to determine. JAMES WOLFE.

“THE possibilities of a Calf's Head are manifold,” read Martha aloud from “The Perfect Flower of Cookery.”

She was alone in the kitchen and in the house. Rising before the sun, she had followed up her rapid toilet by a series of well-planned and, in the main, successful advances upon the adverse conditions which had routed her twenty-four hours earlier.

To begin with, she had succeeded in keeping the fire in all night. The success would tell upon the coal-bin, but she did not care for that—yet! Before going to bed she had stolen downstairs, with her hair done up in a sweeping-cap, taken up cinders and ashes, put on a scuttleful of fresh coal, closed the draughts and shut the dampers, leaving the door below the range slightly ajar, that the fire might not quite smother. She was

The Distractions of Martha

an apt pupil, and the day's lessons had been severe.

When John came downstairs she had fruit and cereal, toast and grilled breakfast bacon for him. Her complexion was muddied by range-heat, and her eyes were thoughtful. Her mien was that of one who foresaw heavy and unexpected responsibilities and was summoning her best forces to meet them.

John made talk over the table, and she was not a bad second. He saw nothing amiss, and went off with a whistle upon his lips and a rosebud in his buttonhole. He knew nothing of the ordered Calf's Head. If he had he would have trusted in the "little woman to fix it up shipshape." His faith in her ability to conquer circumstances was still sound. Martha had forgotten the "THING" until it was brought into the gray-and-blue kitchen and thumped out of the butcher boy's basket upon the table where she stood cutting up the wretched remnant of the costly roast to make croquettes for dinner.

The "P. F. of C." was propped open before her at "ENTREES—BEEF." With an elegant carver that was a wedding present, she was hewing the meat—black at the edges, richly red at heart—into slabs and hunks. Chopping-tray and knife were in readiness.



Martha had forgotten the "THING" until it was brought into the gray-and-blue kitchen.

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

"What is that?" she said, sharply, as the lad tumbled his burden out of the basket.

"The Head!" he answered, as brusquely. "Jus' come in on train from town."

"I see! I had forgotten the order."

"*We* hain't!"

He pitched the empty hamper up to the ceiling, caught it in one hand on the way down, and swaggered out with it on his head, helmet-wise. He was a disagreeable boy. She had seen hundreds of them in school, and had made for herself a reputation in training them into better manners. His manners were less than nothing to her as the Head confronted her. She did not recollect that she had ever seen one *raw!* before at such close quarters. It was certain that she had not expected it to look so *dead!* Its aspect of cadaverous clamminess was a positive and personal affront to her sensibilities. When she compelled herself to take it up and deposit it in the middle of a platter she thought of John the Baptist and the charger.

She went on cutting the meat, her eyes straying continually, by a weird fascination, to the OBJECT! lying there in frozen calm, peering at her through the slits left by lashless eyelids. She could have believed that it smirked at her with the wide, smug mouth. She dropped the

The Distractions of Martha

carver and seized the charger, bore it off to the refrigerator, and shut it out of sight until she should get the mince off her mind.

This last was not so easy as it sounds. The beef may have been tender when it entered the oven. It was toughened, first, by slow heat, then by rapid cooking, and the "P. F. of C." said naught of hewing away cinder and crust and cutting it into dice before consigning it to the tray. Slabs and hunks resisted the chopper. Every upward motion of the blade brought up an adherent morsel—sometimes small, sometimes large. It was only by dint of holding the pieces down with one hand while she chopped with the other that she accomplished the task. One hour was consumed thus, and her arm ached to the shoulder when the mince was finally seasoned, pressed firmly into a bowl, and put away to await afternoon treatment. She had "read up" diligently upon croquettes before deciding in what toothsome form the uncomely left-over should reappear. Failure in fritters need not presage failure in all fried foods.

Loath to waste anything that might be made edible, she had mentally recast the stiff paste that was to have been corn-fritters—a de-appetizing mess in the light of day. A croquette dinner would not be a bad idea, and be excellent

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

practice, besides. Furthermore, it would be a means of retrieving the waste of yesterday.

Nothing daunted by past disasters, she wrote down her new programme while John's kiss was warm upon her mouth:

Soup of Some Kind
(After the apparition of the butcher's boy she specified
"Mock-Turtle")
Beef Croquettes
Corn Croquettes
Potatoes Cut Round and Boiled Whole
Lettuce-and-Egg Salad—the Yolks Left Entire
Fried Bananas
Coffee

"Frugality is not inconsistent with elegance!" was a stock motto with Madame Romaine. Her pupil made a rapid computation. Beef, corn, potatoes and coffee in the house. Likewise, eggs. Lettuce—one head—three cents; six bananas would cost six cents.

"Nine cents outlay for to-day will reduce the average sensibly," murmured the Manager, complacently. This was conquering circumstances. She carolled in making up beds and washing dishes, even in slashing the obdurate meat—until the Head was thrust upon her.

A troubled reverie ended, as we have seen, in

The Distractions of Martha

reference to the Inimitable, because Perfect, Flower.

“The possibilities of a Calf’s Head are manifold,” opened new and tempting vistas. She went on with rising hopes of further reductions on the Average. “The liquor in which it is boiled makes delicious soup. One half of the meat stripped from the bones while hot can be breaded and baked in a mould; the other half may be made into ‘Imitation Tortue’—an excellent imitation of the far-famed Maryland terrapin; savory croquettes are made of the brains, and the tongue, with seasoned vinegar poured over it while hot, is a nice luncheon titbit.”

The Average came down on the run. From an amorphous Calf’s Head, for which she was to pay fifty cents, could be evolved palatable dishes for three days! This was liberal living on narrow means, such as the illiterate and unsystematic drudges of flats and tenement-houses recked not of. For one reckless instant she aspired to add an *entrée* of brain croquettes to today’s dinner. Prudence reined in ambition. She would content herself with the soup, and husband possibilities.

“It cannot be sufficiently deplored that the devotees of ‘plain roast, boiled and fried’ do not acquaint themselves with the merits of a

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

cheap article which is susceptible of so many and such dainty variations."

First upon the list of the variations was:

"CALF'S HEAD SOUP, POPULARLY KNOWN AS MOCK-TURTLE"

"Put the Head over the fire in six quarts of cold water, and boil until the meat leaves the bones of its own accord. To test this, take up the Head with a pair of meat-tongs, or between two great spoons, and transfer to a broad platter. Shake gently to dislodge the flesh; pick out the denuded bones, and return to the soup-pot.

(Mem.: Set aside the meat until next day for the various uses designated at the beginning of this chapter. Do not forget to pour hot spiced vinegar over the tongue.)

"Cut off the ears, and chop them fine. Add them to the boiling soup with a sliced onion (fried in butter), a grated carrot, a bunch of soup-herbs minced, a cupful of strained tomatoes, a teaspoonful of Kitchen Aroma, juice of a lemon and a tablespoonful of the grated rind. Salt and paprika to taste. Simmer all together until the liquid is reduced one-third.

"Then take from the fire, remove the bones with care, and let the soup get cold. It should

The Distractions of Martha

be of jelly-like consistency. Skim off all the fat (and save for dripping). Add a great spoonful of butter rubbed in same of browned flour; season further with a glass of sherry and a teaspoonful of allspice and one of mace. Stir for five minutes, and pour upon a thinly sliced lemon in the bottom of the tureen.

“You may improve this superb soup by the addition of small cubes of the meat—say a cupful—or forcemeat balls made of the brains, or the yolks of six eggs extracted carefully from the whites and dropped into the tureen with the translucent slices of lemon. A few truffles are not amiss.”

“Sounds *de-lic-ious* and altogether practicable!” concluded our housewife, and propping the book open at the right place, she set herself to compound the far-famed delicacy. The water was measured, the Head slid into it, the eye-slits expressive of languid reproach as it sank out of sight. She fitted the cover to the pot, set it in place on the range, and washed her hands in warm water.

“The Thing was so horribly *corpsey!*” she muttered.

The “P. F. of C.” said nothing of the time of boiling. It should certainly be done in an hour, said Reason.

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

Just sixty minutes by the clock, from the moment of sliding the *cadavre* into the pot, she descended to the kitchen, lifted the caldron to the table, and in default of a pair of meat-tongs (whatever they might be) grappled the Head between two big iron spoons, and tugged.

The possessed Casket of so many good things slipped its moorings six times and splashed back sullenly. At the seventh tug she landed it upon the broad platter. Thinking of Robert Bruce, she fitted the grappling apparatus upon the jowls, lifted the Head clear of the platter, and shook it gently to dislodge the flesh. Once—twice—three times was the operation repeated. Then she shook it hard—at the seventh repetition, violently. Beech bark never adhered more obstinately to growing wood than that Thing's flesh to its bone. The eye-slits were tight wrinkles by now. Otherwise, there was no change in its aspect, except that it steamed as she shook it. Returning it to the fire, she let it boil thirty minutes longer. By that time it began to give forth a goodly smell. The grappling-irons held at the third attempt, but the flesh resisted seven hard shakes. Seventy times seven would not have loosened its hold. Convinced of this, Martha dumped it petulantly back into the pot, concluding that this must have been an old calf and

The Distractions of Martha

tough, and resolving to speak her mind to the suspiciously civil butcher at her next visit to his shop. It had been "in" two hours when she made the next unsuccessful trial. At half-past twelve, three hours and a half after the wretched Pest made its first dive into the pot, the flesh yielded to the grasp of the long-enduring spoons, and collapsed, a gelatinous and quivering mass, upon the platter, the bones making a ghastly show among the ruins.

At one o'clock the soup was simmering comfortably upon the range, with bones and chopped ears, sliced onion (fried an hour ago), tomato and lemon-juice and other *et ceteras* in it. The meat was cooling upon the laundry-table preparatory to consignment to the refrigerator, and a woman, weary in body but thankful in spirit, was eating at the kitchen table a luncheon of Veata-Beater and milk. She had meant to poach an egg and to eat it with a slice of toast, but it was "not worth while." Women never cook for themselves. Tea and toast are the chief of spinsters' and widows' diet. Martha had "ideas" on dietetics, and eschewed tea. She esteemed herself a broad, rather than a narrow-minded woman, and when she analyzed the supreme complacency that possessed her soul because the meat had slipped from the bones, she

What May Be Done with a Calp's Head

set it down to wifely regard. She did want to be a good wife to the best husband alive, and a man must be well fed or he cannot keep healthy, useful and happy.

She washed her cereal-bowl, put it away, and peeped at the soup. There had been two quarts of it when it was put over the fire to simmer. When reduced one third there would be three pints. She would measure it now, to make sure that all was going on well. A quarter of a cupful had boiled away. At this rate it would be ready for cooling at three o'clock.

She had a justly contemptuous opinion of women who wasted time through ignorance of the art of dove-tailing duties. At three o'clock she would be back at her post, prepared to cool the soup, to make out the croquettes and set them on the ice. At five she would begin to cook. After she was fairly "at home" and people began to be neighborly, the dovetailing must be even more deftly done. Just now John and she wanted no company. By then, too, practice in cookery would have bred such perfection that she would have leisure for social duties.

She betook herself to her room, donned a dressing-gown, and lay down upon a sofa with a book in her hand. This was luxury, unknown except on Sundays and in vacations, during seven years

The Distractions of Martha

of teaching. The right to dispose of her time at her own sweet will was still a novel delight.

Country odors—the nutty flavor of autumn leaves, of aromatic herbage, and hedges of October roses—and country sounds—the tinkle of a cow-bell, the far-off happy yelp of a dog mingled with children's laughter, the sigh of the wind in the pine-tree under the window—floated into the happy stillness of a tasteful home which was all hers—and John's! She read for an hour, grew drowsy, and fell asleep. Early rising, unaccustomed fatigue, youth and health, and the abounding peace of mind consequent upon the slipping of the flesh from the bones, combined to make the siesta long. Three strokes of the clock in a church-tower a few squares away awoke her with a frightened start.

The soup was her first thought. Belting her wrapper with an apron and twisting her hair up as she went, she flew downstairs. The kitchen was full of savory steam; the unctuous bubble of the pot subsided reluctantly as she bore it to the table. The reduced liquid hissed and spluttered in flowing over the bare sides of the hot vessel into the quart measure. Some of the bones stuck to the bottom. When freed from these there was less than a quart of soup. Again fact had defied scientific calculation.

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

Blissfully ignorant of the truth that bones and minced meat would have burned to the kettle in five minutes more, Martha set the soup in the laundry to cool preparatory to skimming. It looked nice and it tasted good. The meat of that transmogrified Head was firm and cold. In carrying it to the refrigerator she stepped lightly and warbled blithely. All was going well. The sufferings of yesterday were not thrown away. Two of the useful saws with which her memory was bountifully stored arose to her lips. Seven years in the instructor's harness had disposed her to didactic moralizing:

“The man who never makes mistakes will never make anything else.” And, “He is wise who kisses the rod when it is Failure that disciplines.”

Still singing, she set about moulding her croquettes. They would be firmer if made some hours before frying, she had learned from Madame Romaine. The savoriness of the soup lingered even in the well-ventilated Art Kitchen; the October sun shot yellow smiles between the bowed shutters; she had plenty of time in which to “get” her dinner. She would always leave a margin after yesternight's experience. The corn paste was as potter's clay in her befloured hands. She had handled sculptor's clay in the

The Distractions of Martha

kindergarten, and she pleased herself by modelling her croquettes in the shape of fruits—pears, apples, peaches and nutmeg melons. The conceit was felicitous, and, so far as she knew, original. In fancy she could see John's admiring smile and hear his "Oh, I say!" Who says there is no poetry in cookery?

The beef was less amenable to the moulding hand. She had tempered it, according to the recipe, with one-third the quantity of dry bread-crumbs, seasoned it with salt, pepper and onion-juice, wet it with gravy, and bound it with the beaten yolk of an egg. Consistent to the perversity it had displayed in bulk, the disintegrated particles refused to be "bound." She trebled the flour in which they were rolled upon the dish and on her palms; she patted and pinched and pressed them. As soon as they were released from her hold they spread shapelessly and widely.

"Arrange the ovates upon a floured platter, not near enough together to touch one another, and set on ice for two hours before frying in deep fat," enjoined the recipe.

The possessed slush meandered idiotically and affectionately toward other slushy portions, and covered the surface of the biggest platter in the house. Perhaps she had not measured the ingredients wisely. She had guessed at the crumbs.

What May Be Done with a Calf's Head

The thought was an inspiration: A heaping cupful of fine crumbs—in point of fact, cracker-crumbs, as being finer and drier than bread—subdued the rebellion. The suspended law of cohesion was coaxed into action again. A handful of flour sealed her success. Ten egg-shaped balls lay respectfully asunder upon a clean floured dish.

“Enough for dinner and for breakfast,” mused the economist, leaving them with the “corn fruit” in the ice-box.

She peeled and breaded six bananas, ordered by telephone, which were to carry forward the croquette scheme into the dessert; pared and trimmed six potatoes to match the beef croquettes in size and form, and put six eggs on to boil hard for salad. Eggs were not cheap at this season, and neither she nor John could dispose of three hard yolks apiece, any more than each could eat three bananas and three potatoes. She “downed” the qualm of frugality with the reflection that she would have all the more opportunities of exercising her rapidly growing skill upon “left-overs.” At this rate—with the Calf's Head as a reserve force—she would not need to go to market again for a week.

A stroke of housewifery genius was the resolution to make one saucepan of deep fat do all the

The Distractions of Martha

frying. She told off the various articles in order upon the tips of three fingers:

First, the corn fruit, lest it should be discolored if put in at a later stage; next, the bananas; lastly, the beef. Corn and bananas to be kept hot in the oven while the meat is frying. The sequence was orderly and practical.

So much for System!

CHAPTER VI

A CROQUETTE DINNER

Poor in abundance; famished at a feast.
YOUNG'S Night Thoughts.

"OH, I say!" ejaculated John, taking up his soup-spoon. "This is something new, isn't it?"

He might well ask. Had he uttered forth his whole mind he would have quoted the "gruel thick and slab" of the witch's caldron. The contents of his plate were of the consistency of mortar, and dark brown in color. There were lumps in the mortar, for the great spoonful of butter was not thoroughly incorporated with "some of browned flour," and the latter had charred bits in it. The knack of browning flour is not learned in a single lesson—nor in six.

The soup had suffered too much reduction. But reduction in bulk had not weakened the strength of the seasoning. Those elements of might, "salt and pepper to taste," had found their hands; the teaspoonful of allspice and one of mace were heaping. Result, a spiced and salted porridge, which was uneatable by the most indulgent of husbands. John swallowed two mouth-

The Distractions of Martha

fuls, the first large and confident, the second small and dismayed, before Martha interfered. Her own spoon was still clean. She could not have eaten the most savory masterpiece of culinary art. Her smile was all muscle and no mirth.

“Jack, dear, don’t try to eat the miserable mess! It’s a failure, through and through! I can’t imagine why, for I followed the directions faithfully——”

Muscle and voice failed her. Jack kicked back his chair, and rushed around the table to kiss her.

“Of course you did! The fault is in the rascally recipe. Most of them are frauds and fakes, in my opinion. It’s the same with bookkeeping, single and double entry, taught in books. You could beat your printed recipe out of your own clever head with one hand tied behind you, and not half try. Never mind, pet! Never say die! Better luck next time and the rest of it! Here—we’ll hustle the stuff off to the kitchen, and do all the more justice to the next course because we haven’t filled up on this. I always did say that soup takes the edge off a full-grown appetite.”

The next course came on in a silver hot-water dish, the gift of John’s colleagues in business. He patted it affectionately in setting it down before his place, and picked up the carver.

A Croquette Dinner

“You won’t need that, dear,” said Martha, with a brave front and quaking heart.

The beef croquettes had been third in the line of promotion to the deep fat. Made cautious by failures, she had tried one at a time. Each went in round and brown, sank out of sight in the tumultuous waves, and rose to the surface, gaping wide, and black as tar. After four were spoiled she threw the overtaken fat into the garbage-pail, scrubbed the saucepan; and heated a new supply.

Number five neither sank nor rose promptly. When at last it went out of soundings, and reappeared, it staggered and rolled like a water-logged punt. But the color was healthy, and despite divers suspicious cracks that boded disintegration, it was safely transferred to a hot colander. Of the seven which succeeded it, three crumbled in the split spoon *en route* to the colander. Surmising that the fat was heating too fast again, she set it at the side of the range for a minute.

“Slow and sure is a better kitchen motto than fast and loose!”

None of the roulettes were firm. In transferring them to the hot-water dish they had to be coaxed and bolstered into shape and stability. They did not look amiss in the environment of

The Distractions of Martha

parsley tucked about their infirm forms, and disguising irregularities.

“Pretty as a picture!” pronounced John, plunging the carving-fork into the plumpest.

The fork came up empty from the dissevered croquette. He nodded approvingly. “Tender as butter, aren’t they?”

A spoon conveyed a heap of dry hash to his wife’s plate, and he helped himself. It was dry; it was over-seasoned. “A pinch of cayenne if you like, a dash of Worcestershire, other condiments at discretion,” were instructions that gave the cook a liberal margin; and, as John was fond of saying, there was nothing mean about our Martha. Moreover, she abhorred insipidity.

Each croquette was soaked to the core with grease. John had not made all these discoveries when his wife laid upon the plate, passed in exchange for hers, something that was like the churn puzzle we learned as children—“big at the bottom, little at the top”—with a whole clove stuck into the small end. It reposed jauntily upon a green leaf.

“A new variety of pear—the Purcell!” explained Martha, gayly. “I have an apple from the same orchard.”

“By George!” cried John. “You’re a genius! What is it? Potato?” He clove the pear

A Croquette Dinner

through the middle, which was raw and viscid. He cut off a morsel, and put it into his mouth. It was tough and flavorless. The hot fat had cooked a quarter inch of the surface. The paste of chopped corn, flour and egg resisted further advance.

He was a sweet-tempered fellow, and deeply in love with the wife he rated as his superior intellectually, morally and spiritually. But he was human and hungry, and it was not in furnishing mortal nature not to feel and to look disappointed. He munched away soberly upon the salty dust and ashes of the beef croquette, and worked hard to rid his teeth of the half-baked dough that tasted like chicken-feed. Then he ate two slices of bread and butter, and Martha got up to remove the plates and bring in the salad—too wretched to make talk.

Her favorite maxim came to her like a sardonic whisper as her eye revolted from the untempting *débris* upon his plate:

“Elegance is not incompatible with frugality.”

She had achieved neither. She was an impostor, self-deceived, but none the less guilty of imposing plated ware for sterling upon this trustful, gallant gentleman.

She would not have believed three days ago that his wife could ever be so unhappy as she

The Distractions of Martha

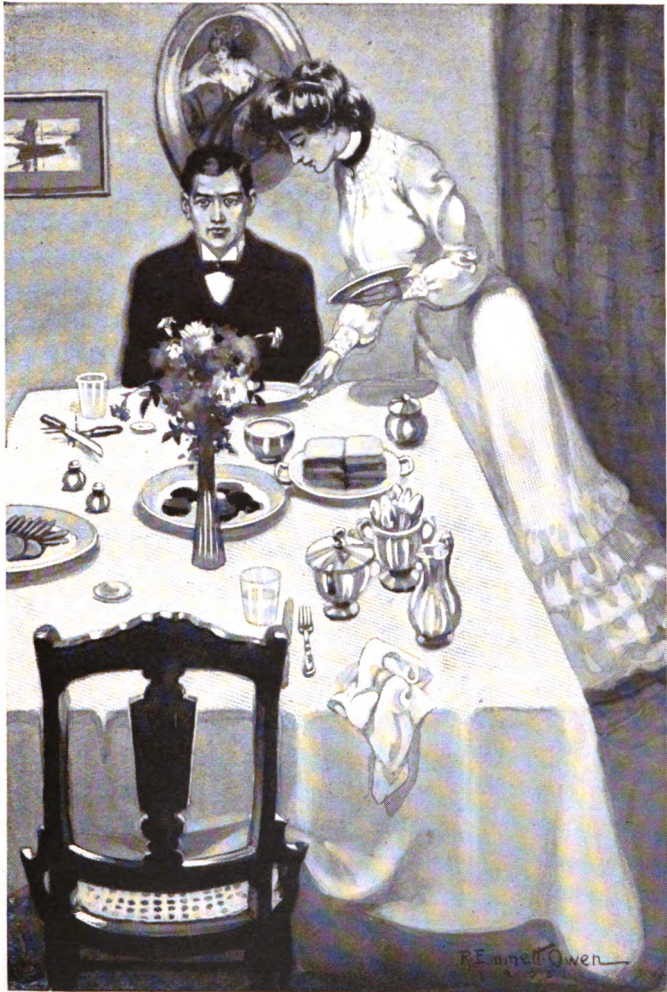
felt and looked while getting the cut-glass salad-bowl (another wedding present) from the refrigerator, and taking it to the dining-room. The third course, and as yet not a thing fit to eat, after all her planning and dreaming and measuring! What must John think of her? What could he be thinking at this instant except that his ideals of home and comfort and the beauty of living had been barbarously crushed?

As she passed behind his chair, he leaned his head back suddenly to rest it on her shoulder—a dear, familiar gesture which brought the tears in a gush. She set down the bowl and clasped the head in her arms.

“Jack, you are an angel, and I am a fraud!” she got out, in an hysterical gasp.

“Pooh! One part of that speech is as true as the other!” reaching around to pull her to his knee. “I say, Patty, sit still, and we’ll eat that salad as we are. That’s a jolly idea.”

Between laughing, crying and scolding, she let him hold her, while he pulled two plates up to his free hand. The salad might redeem her skill yet. It was wilted and unaccountably shrunken, after lying in the dressing for three hours. The “P. F. of C.” had never lisped a word of the inexpediency of putting condiments and lettuce together at an early stage of the action.



Martha got up to remove the plates and bring in the salad.

A Croquette Dinner

The design was good—a nest of crisp lettuce-leaves, dotted on the rim by nasturtium-flowers, and in the centre six firm yolks laid upon an inner lining of the shredded whites. The leaves looked as if they had been scalded; the nasturtiums were faded and languid; the yellow yolks were darkened in patches, and the whites, representing down, were streaked with queer black lines. The whole construction swam in liquid, the vinegar having drawn all the sap from the crisp esculent.

To the usual formula of vinegar, oil, salt and pepper the recipe had added, “Some epicures fancy a soupçon of cayenne, and rather more than a soupçon of mustard.”

Well-read Martha, recalling Sydney Smith’s famous injunction:

Of mordant mustard take a single spoon;
Distrust the condiment that bites too soon,

had put in a “generous” teaspoonful, and half as much cayenne.

At his first taste John said “By Jupiter!” and seized his tumbler. At the second trial he gave over the attempt to eat it, holding down her hand when she would have carried a portion to her lips.

“Don’t, darling! It would burn the heart out

The Distractions of Martha

of you! You must have mistaken the cayenne for the other pepper. Or you got hold of the wrong recipe. You'd better chuck that con-founded cook-book into the fire." And, with a sorry effort at fun-making more like sarcasm than she had believed him guilty of—"Man cannot live by bread alone, you know—even when it is buttered. Bring on your pudding, or whatever it is, and let's get this business over with!"

She obeyed in meekness so abject, submission so sorrowful, that he jumped up and took the second-sized silver hot-water dish from her at her reappearance, set it upon the table with a thump, and took her to a repentant heart.

"I'm a selfish savage, Patty! I'll eat the whole dishful if you'll bring it back—if it sears my tongue down to the roots!"

She dried her wet eyes upon the lapel of his coat, and after a little more pretty fooling, they sat down again, this time in their proper places, and ate the banana croquettes. They were greasy and "soggy" from having been put into the fat too soon and having lain in it too long. They were so much more tolerable than their predecessors that the hungry husband, and the wife, who had lunched on Veata-Beater and milk, positively relished them. John ate four, improvising an accompaniment of crackers and cheese, and

A Croquette Dinner

settling them with a cup of fairly strong and hot coffee. After which he lit a cigar and tried not to recollect the scandalous anecdote of the "mate corner" and the more outrageous tale of Sambo and the "onfillin'est possum."

The moon was up by the time the garbage-pail had received the last "left-over"; the dishes were washed and in place upon the shelves, and the Art Kitchen was quite itself again. Martha wrapped a shawl about her shoulders, and they strolled up and down the brief piazza upon the moonlit side of the cottage. The kitchen abutted upon one end of the porch. The windows being opened, John caught at each turn a dying whiff of the cold-and-fried smell, and puffed fast upon his cigar to banish it.

"Only eight o'clock!" he exclaimed, as the steeple chimes rang out, and the officious little clock upon the shelf in the kitchen mimicked them. "There's one good thing about— Bah!"

He jerked his cigar from his lips, and spat a flake of tobacco from his tongue, wiping that member fussily with his handkerchief.

"One good thing about—"echoed Martha, innocently.

"Ah! Hum! Yes!" blundered John. "What was I saying? Oh, yes! About the shortening days. They give us nice long evenings!"

The Distractions of Martha

He wiped a bead of real perspiration from his forehead before putting the handkerchief back in his pocket, for what he had come bitterly near saying was—"About a dinner a fellow can't eat. It doesn't take long to do it!"

CHAPTER VII

AN ANGEL UNAWARES

My friend! my well-spring in the wilderness!
GEORGE ELIOT.

“OH, you poor, *poor* dear!”

As Martha Burr, our heroine had held Rosa Dunn of the Primary Department in low esteem so far as mental plenishing went. She was a merry, good-hearted little thing, popular with everybody, and so much beloved by the children, that she retained her place, despite very mediocre talents, until her marriage three years ago. Martha had never seen her since the wedding-day. She did not know that she lived in Budfield until Rosa notified her of the fact by calling upon her old acquaintance in due form on the afternoon of the Purcells' third day in their cottage home.

“Too funny, isn't it, that I should have found you out by the merest accident?” rattled on the visitor, when greetings had been exchanged. “I happened to be at the butcher's yesterday morning just as he was sending his boy around with

The Distractions of Martha

a beautiful calf's head 'to Mrs. John Purcell.' He's a sociable fellow, and he managed to let me know that you were a bride and a new customer, and 'seemed to be a most lovely lady.' So, as I had seen your marriage in the paper, I jumped to the conclusion that the lovely bride was my old friend, and I asked Tom (that's *my* Mr. Risley, you know) last night if he knew anything about your husband, and he did, and his wife's (that's *you!*) maiden name. And to think our back yards almost join! It's *too* delicious for anything! I could *kiss* that calf's head!"

Martha's laugh had a rueful break. "I couldn't!" she said.

Before she knew what she was doing, she was pouring the tale of woes, varied and unlooked for, into Rosa's ear, and getting sympathy in true scriptural measure, heaped up, pressed down and running over, from the "good-hearted little thing" she had patronized and looked down upon in the old times they had shared.

"Oh, you poor, *poor* dear!" cried Rosa for the sixth time, when the story of the Croquette Dinner was concluded.

Once the repetition would have irked Martha. Now it was like another touch of cooling salve to a burn. Having said it, Rosa fell into a brief reverie.

An Angel Unawares

She was prettier—by far—than Rosa Dunn had been. Her roly-poly figure was erect and trig; she was becomingly dressed; her eyes were bright, her color was good. She looked like the happy wife and proud mother she had declared herself to be. The touch of matronly sedateness which settled upon her with the reverie was attractive. Involuntary respect for her took root in Martha's heart as the other began to speak slowly and gravely:

“I think the unkindest turn a mother can do her daughter is to let her grow up as ignorant of housekeeping—especially of cooking and all that, you know—as you and I were when we got married. You lost your mother when you were a mere girl. Mine is living still, and you may be sure I have let her know my sentiments on that subject.

“I said to her the last time I was in New Brunswick (that was my home, you know)—‘We were taught all sorts of arts and sciences except the one upon which most of a woman's happiness and the health and comfort of any family she may have depend. It is downright cruelty to all concerned to let her marry while she is such an ignoramus.’”

“She said—and there is some truth in it—that nowadays girls seem to have no time for

The Distractions of Martha

housework, much less kitchen-work. It's kindergarten by the time they can run about, then school, and lessons to be studied at home, that leave no time for any other sort of work.

“ ‘As soon as you were graduated, Rosa, you went away from home to teach school in New York,’ said she. ‘Will you please tell me when you could have learned how to cook and wash and iron? It's easy finding fault! When your baby is a big girl you will do as the rest of us mothers do,’ she said.

“ ‘Not on your life!’ said I. ‘She's going through an apprenticeship under her mother in vacation. And from the beginning she shall comprehend that housekeeping is every woman's profession, no matter what other business she may follow. It's the *sine qua non* for her. She shall learn this from her *mother*—not from such sharp experiences as I have had.’ Why, Martha, the first time I cooked beets, I peeled them before they were boiled! Would you believe it?”

Martha stared in genuine bewilderment. “Well,” she said, simply, “why not?”

Rosa's gesture was tragic. “Of course ‘why not?’ They don't teach you to boil beets in fancy cooking-classes, any more than they teach you to peel potatoes and wash dishes, and a hundred other things as necessary to the comfort of

An Angel Unawares

a family as the breath they draw. We sit there in our good clothes, book and pencil in hand, and take notes as we did in chemistry and ancient-history classes in school, and go home thinking we know it all because we've written down what the teacher did. About as sensible as for a school-girl who doesn't know her scales yet to think she can play something that she has seen Paderewski do so easily!"

"But there are so many cook-books—all claiming to be practical—that anybody of ordinary intelligence should be able to learn in a short time," ventured Martha.

She had entered upon the study of humility three days ago.

Rosa had pulled off one glove; she slapped the palm of a bare hand with it at the most impressive periods of her discourse. Martha noticed, abstractedly, that the glove was pearl-gray, the palm plump and pink.

"Cook-books are well enough—some of them! I have one that's worth its weight in gold. *Provided*, always and *every* time, that you know some things already! In cooking—maybe in other things—you must do a thing in order to learn how to do it. That's a culinary maxim! In the cooking-class all goes upon velvet. Madame or Monsieur puts eggs together with a dash of this

The Distractions of Martha

and a suspicion of that—and presto! there's an omelet! That's exact science, you'll say. One fourth of it may be. Three fourths is *practice!* It looks as easy as sliding down a greased plank. Exact science won't make your first attempt a success. No, nor your fifth! It's a step at a time, and you've *got* to begin at the bottom. I reminded myself, for the first six months of my housekeeping life, of the oversmart children who used to come to me fresh from kindergarten, and thought they could read when they had never tried to do it."

"You dishearten one who *must* do it whether she knows how or not! I must read, even if I never learned my letters."

Martha tried to say it laughingly, biting her lower lip to stop its trembling.

"You poor, *poor* dear!" said Rosa for the seventh time. She jerked off the other glove, and laid both on the table.

"See here, Martha Burr—*Purcell!* I beg your pardon! We'll come down to business. I don't know much, and that little I've got, as the Frenchman said he got his English, 'by the perspiration of my eyebrow.' Such as it is, it is at your service. You did me many a good turn when I was a raw, stupid goose at teaching. It's only fair I should lend a hand when I can. What

An Angel Unawares

are you going to cook for dinner this identical afternoon?"

"The cook-books—and everything else—are in the kitchen," Martha answered, with blended pride and diffidence. "If you wouldn't mind going in there, I could explain better."

"*Delighted!*" Rosa unpinned her hat, and laid it by the gloves. "What a lark!" Tripping gayly after her hostess, she cried out in unfeigned rapture at sight of the Symphony in Gray and Blue. "It's a dream!" clasping her hands. "Cooking in here must be as good as novel-reading."

Martha winced behind her complacent smile. Rosa ran from cupboard to pantry, begged permission to open drawers, and exclaimed anew at each revelation of her friend's taste and ingenuity. When the hostess, catching her spirit, proposed afternoon tea, the guest would not hear of drinking it in the drawing-room or library. They would brew it and enjoy it in that "*seraphic*" kitchen that had not its equal in Budfield, or anywhere else, for that matter.

Over the brew they became yet more intimate, and upon the repetition of Rosa's leading query, her friend confided her intention of converting the best portion of the calf's head, stored in the refrigerator, into Imitation Terrapin, Rosa stared

The Distractions of Martha

ignorantly, and "The Perfect Flower of Cookery" was brought to the front.

"Cut the cold, gelatinous covering of the Head into dice," read Martha with proper emphasis and discretion. "Have ready in a saucepan a cup of strong stock; the yolks of three hard-boiled eggs; a double handful of forcemeat balls, made of the minced tongue, rubbed to a paste with the brains, a third as much bread-crumbs, and the yolks of two eggs, and seasoned with pepper, salt, onion-juice and a pinch of grated lemon. They should be the size of large marbles, and rolled in flour. Set on ice until the terrapin is nearly ready to serve. Heat the stock, season with onion, pepper, salt, and minced sweet herbs, with a judicious dash of Kitchen Aroma, and put in the meat dice. Simmer until the dice are translucent, add the forcemeat marbles and the eggs, also cut into cubes. When very hot, take up carefully with a perforated spoon, and heap in the centre of a hot-water dish or a hot platter. If the latter, keep warm over boiling water (in a *bain-marie* if you have it) while you thicken the gravy with browned flour rolled in a great spoonful of butter; stir until smooth and consistent throughout, add a generous glass of sherry, and pour over the savory ragout.

An Angel Unawares

“The resemblance to real terrapin—that joy of the epicure!—may be enhanced by whipping the yolks of two eggs smooth, and stirring into the gravy thirty seconds before it comes from the fire.”

Struck by her friend’s silence when the reading ceased, Martha looked up from the book. Rosa sat on the other side of the tea-tray, her elbows on the table, her chin in her hollowed palms, gazing at her hostess as a charmed bird at a snake, eyes dilate and lips apart.

“Well?” queried Martha.

Whereupon the practical housewife said once again, slowly and hollowly, “Oh, you *poor*, *poor* dear! Give *me* that book!” she added in the same tone, stretching out an imperative hand.

She turned a leaf, and read silently, her lips moving after the fashion of children or the uneducated. She read so deliberately that the other grew impatient.

“*Well!*” she interjected once more. “Doesn’t it seem feasible? Don’t you think it will be very savory?”

“It will—be—horribly—*expensive!*” dropping each syllable gingerly. “Three eggs to be boiled hard, two (raw) for the marbles—five!—and if you want to make it very *terrapiny*, two more

The Distractions of Martha

—seven! Eggs are thirty-five cents a dozen just now. Then, butter, wine and gravy— You've got *that*, I suppose?"

Martha reddened. "I am going to order a can of Gallic-Anglican Soup—mock-turtle or ox-tail—and use that instead, not happening to have any gravy on hand."

"Exactly! That would be thirty cents more. You paid fifty for the head—and have had a soup out of it."

"Ought to have had, you mean," corrected the other, with a sorry attempt at facetiousness.

"Yes, you poor, *poor* dear! What I meant is that the trimmings will cost more than the gown—the meat, I would say. Now, dear!" locking her fingers upon the open book, and talking faster, "you are making the very selfsame blunder I made three years ago—being too ambitious! It's the foolhardiness of abject ignorance—that's what it is! We were grown women—and teachers—for so long that we aren't willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder. It isn't flattering to our vanity to learn the 'a b c' of anything—especially of something that any fool of a woman who can't write her name is expected to know. But we've *got* to do it! You're finding that out as fast as is safe for you to do if



"Oh, you *poor*, *poor* dear! Give *me* that book."

An Angel Unawares

you don't want to bring up in the insane asylum inside of a month. You must creep before you walk, and walk before you run. You are quite sure you don't mind my speaking so plainly?"

Martha nodded, and laid a reassuring hand upon those joined over the fat "Flower." Her heart was getting very full.

"Thank you! You see, I've been there! Repeatedly, I may say! And I'm just as sorry for others situated as I was then as I can be. Begin with plain things—the rudiments, as you might say. Terrapin and croquettes, and 'imitations' generally, are very fine when you've learned the lessons that went before them. You've plunged right into Long Division before you've got the Addition Table by heart. To come down to the plain facts of the present case—just leave that famous Head out of the question. To-morrow, if you'll let me, I'll run over and show you how to make a spiced pickle to pour over it that'll change it to what our mothers call 'souse' in a couple of days, and make a nice Sunday night relish."

"But I haven't anything else in the house for dinner," said poor Martha, grateful, yet despairing, "and the butcher closes his market at three o'clock in the afternoon."

The Distractions of Martha

“That’s all right. Don’t interrupt me again, *please!* until my story is done. You remind me of the jingle of

The man who had a calf,
And that’s half.

That calf’s head is just half! The other half is a ‘dinky’ bit of steak in my refrigerator. I bought it this morning, thinking Tom would be at home. He telephoned at noon that he has to go to Philadelphia, and won’t be home until to-morrow. I was just puzzling my head what to do with that meat before I came over. Don’t interrupt me! That’s true as gospel. For my maid is going out, and you don’t suppose I’d cook anything for *myself!* Did you ever see a woman who would? Not a word! The story is done! At half-past five o’clock the steak and I will be on hand. Had you thought of scalloped potatoes to go with it? My Tom *dotes* on scalloped potatoes! And they are easy as easy! You may peel them before I come. Have your can of soup opened and turned out into a bowl to take the air off, and the table set, and all that, you know.”

Martha was well-nigh voiceless. “I can’t thank you as I ought—” she began.

“Then don’t try!” snapped Rosa, in affected

An Angel Unawares

petulance. "And please understand *I'm* not going to cook your dinner—only boss you a bit. 'Wot' larks!"

She flung the morsel of slang over her shoulder as she ran out of the back door and "across lots" home.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN EATS AND MORALIZES

For nothing lovelier can be found
In woman than to study household good,
And good works in her husband to promote.
MILTON, *Paradise Lost*.

JOHN PURCELL had had a trying day. Business had been remorseless in demands upon time and thought, in result so unsatisfactory that he put the calculation resolutely out of his mind when he turned his face homeward.

He was ashamed that he let himself down lumpishly from the train to the station platform, and he straightened up. Why should he slouch when he had nothing to tire him beyond the usual daily routine? A married man, with wife and home as the terminus of his walk, should bear himself gallantly. He beat off a nasty thought at the turn that would bring his house in sight.

“I hope to heaven,” said a perverse spirit in his ear, “that the boarding-house smell hasn’t come to stay! I haven’t the stomach for it to-night!”

The evening was cloudy, and darkness fell

John Eats and Moralizes

early. The light from the dining-room windows, softened by shades and curtains, was yet full and cheery. By some occult principle of divination he knew at once why Martha had left the blinds open. In quickening his pace he breathed a bar of "There's a Light in the Window for Thee!"

His wife opened the door before he could apply the latch-key. The warmed air that floated out was fragrant with—could it be savory meat such as his soul loved? His heart and arms opened impulsively at the suggestion. He did not love the priestess of the Shrine more fondly for associating her with good things to come, but he appreciated suddenly that this was a Home worth keeping and holding, and that she was the motive power.

He changed his collar, and put on a cravat Martha liked particularly before he came downstairs, brushed his clothes, and ran the comb twice through his hair to make it lie smoothly yet lightly above a contented face.

"Dinner is waiting, love!" called Martha from the foot of the stairs.

Her voice had a new ring, a sort of exultant throb, that chimed in exactly with his mood. He joined her on the threshold of the dining-room. The goodly smell filled his nostrils and floated

The Distractions of Martha

through his soul, lending unction to the brief grace uttered with bowed head and sincere thanksgiving. Then Martha ladled out the soup.

Real soup! that could be drunk without chewing! Without a suspicion that it was bought ready-made, and had been "doctored" under the "boss's" directions with boiling water, sherry and lemon-juice, out of all resemblance to "canned goods," John revived visibly with each mouthful, and praised unstintedly.

A beefsteak followed—brown, hot, juicy. John sighed blissfully as his much-prized carver made its way tenderly into the reeking heart. Here, for the first time, was matter worthy of its steel.

He looked across the "dainty dish" at his *vis-à-vis*, moisture that was not all savory steam rising between her and him.

"Patty, precious! this is perfect! And worth all the fancy flapdoodles and gimcracks all the cooking-teachers in creation could concoct. And cooked to a turn! Blood-rare! Juice follows the knife!"

Martha blushed high and prettily. "Thank you! That is the first steak I ever cooked. And these"—lifting a cover—"are my first scalloped potatoes. There is macaroni with cheese sauce in the other vegetable-dish. Rosa Risley—you

John Eats and Moralizes

never knew Rosa Dunn, did you?—watched me do it all. She wouldn't lay a finger to it, because, as she said, you would enjoy it the more if it was my work."

"Right she is!" responded the husband, stoutly, between mouthfuls. "And if the truth were told, I've no doubt you're a better cook than she is any day."

"Oh, Jack! how little you know about it!" cried the conscience-smitten apprentice. "We'll have a long talk over it when you've had your dinner. Eat heartily, for our dessert is a very simple affair."

"Can't be too simple!" averred John. "A fellow that can't fill up with a steak like this and two vegetables, after such a 'starter' as that soup, ought to be condemned for the rest of his days to a diet of—sawdust and water!"

He caught himself up adroitly for a novice, but said not another word for five minutes. Had the quick-eared, sharp-witted woman at the head of the table guessed how near he had come to saying "burnt beef and croquettes"?

The dessert was a dish of grapes, followed by coffee.

"I wonder," said Martha over the coffee, "if there is any truth in the story of Benjamin Franklin and the sawdust pudding?"

The Distractions of Martha

“About as much as in the story of the Frenchman and the pebble soup,” opined John. “Not that I haven’t eaten, at one time and another, the pudding and the soup. The fact is, my pet—May I light a cigar? Thank you! The fact of the business is that you can’t make good, substantial nourishing food for human beings—or beasts, either, for that matter—out of nothing, no matter how much seasoning you put in. That reminds me of a description I heard an Irishman, who boarded at the same hash-joint with me one winter, give of a pumpkin pie we had on Thanksgiving Day. He said, ‘Devil a thing was there in it except punkin an’ pepper!’ You’ve got to have a foundation for everything. When the foundation is sawdust, or pebbles, you’ve got a sham,—a mess, that insults the people you set down to it. Is that tray ready? Let me take it!”

Martha followed him soberly as he bore the load of soiled dishes to the kitchen. She could not believe him guilty of the unkindness of talking *at* her, but the memory of her ambitious “messes” lay heavily upon her spirits. While she washed, dried and put away china, glass and silver, John smoked and talked in high content in a rocking-chair, his long legs reaching half way across the blue-and-gray linoleum.

“I say! I am going to make a confession,”

John Eats and Moralizes

he blurted out presently, with a laugh. "I came home *cross* to-night! cross as a bear with a sore head! I have been cross all day. I thought it was business worries. I know now that I was hungry. And a hungry man is a savage. I suppose you women don't know anything about that, eh?"

"No," said Martha, thoughtfully, "I doubt if we do. I have often forgotten to eat until reminded by faintness and headache that it was past dinner, or luncheon-time, or that I had hurried off to school without my breakfast."

"A man would have been ready to murder his brother by that time. We're built that way. Why, I don't know, unless to provide occupation for cooks, and to keep hotel and restaurant keepers from starving. They'd all go out of business if our appetites matched yours. I'm no glutton. Few decent men *are* gluttons. But we must be fed regularly and well—bones, muscles and brains getting their share. After such a dinner as you gave me to-night I don't mind telling you that more men are driven to drink by bad cookery than by any other one thing. And, knowing you to be a long-headed, sensible manager—like the Pattern Woman in Proverbs—I may say that what tempts more men to dishonesty than anything else is their wives' extravagance.

The Distractions of Martha

Take a young girl who never did any marketing in her life, and set her to providing for a family. Ten chances to one she throws away money with both hands. The kind that ordered a leg of lamb one day, and told the butcher next day to send a leg of beef! That's hardly an exaggeration. There are plenty of such ignoramuses in Christian America. I can't call them fools, for they have natural sense enough. The poor things have never been taught the main thing that every woman—I don't care what her station may be—ought to know. She may never need to do her own cooking, but she must be able to teach her servants. At any rate, to know whether they do their work properly or not."

He puffed leisurely and meditatively. Martha, her back to him, that he might not see two furtive tears that splashed upon her hands, seemed to be rearranging the brave show of blue-and-gray crockery in the corner cupboard.

Unobservant John prosed on, his eyes following the rings of smoke rising straight until they battered themselves to pieces against the ceiling:

"I'm not saying that men think of these things when they are choosing wives. It's a pity, maybe, they don't take them into account. A woman who is a good housekeeper is likely to make a fellow happier because she makes him more com-



"I don't mind telling you that more men are driven to drink by bad cooking than by any other one thing."

John Eats and Moralizes

fortable than your fine musician, or painter, or literary woman—don't you know? I don't mean a fool, of course. But you're a living proof that a woman may cultivate her intellect, and yet be a tiptop housekeeper. I was too cross—because I was hungry—to read much of my paper on the way out. But I did happen to see something that fitted in so neatly with what I was thinking about, and what I've just been saying, that I cut it out and brought it home to show you."

Martha came behind him, and patted the top of his head, arresting his hand on the way to his pocket.

"You are very good to stay in here with me while I was at work," she said, gently. "Suppose we go into the library before you begin to read."

They walked into the tiny nook dignified by the stately name. John's arm was around her trim waist. He was very much in love to-night. Martha pondered upon the strong probability that his dinner had to do with the rise in love's mercury. She was sure of it, after he read the cutting extracted from his left-hand vest-pocket:

"I cannot understand the difference between men and women about eating. It is such a radical difference, and there doesn't seem to be any reason for it. It gave rise to the old saw, "The

The Distractions of Martha

way of a man's heart is to his stomach," and many maidens have profited thereby—if gaining a permanent position as cook is to be regarded as profit.

“ ‘The man who comes home a nervous wreck, cross, irritable, taciturn, after a meal to his liking is a creature to conjure with, so great is the change wrought. It is an established fact that criminals eat well when awaiting trial, and even execution. Men in destitute circumstances will sacrifice everything for the sake of three hearty meals a day, where with women, clothing, or, in rarer instances, reading matter, is a first consideration.

“ ‘Men in distress go and eat—and feel better; if women attempt it, they feel worse. The very thought of food repels them; it chokes them, and actually does them more harm than good. To eat in a time of grief seems to them sacrilege. They cry out against the necessity after days of fasting, and yield only in degrees. Women cannot suffer and eat at the same time. Men can. And that is the difference I cannot understand.’

“Nor I either!” supplemented John, relighting his cigar, which had gone out during the reading. “But every word of that is as true as gospel. I’d like to shake hands with the fellow who wrote it, whoever he was.”

John Eats and Moralizes

He turned the slip of paper over, and looked at the back, as if expecting to find the signature.

“His head is level, and it has brains in it.”

Martha had her mending-basket, and was running inquisitive fingers into the toes of a pair of socks, using more energy than was quite needful to establish the fact that the web was thin in one spot.

“No man ever wrote that!” she said, emphatically. “How should *he* know that women can’t eat and suffer at the same time? Nobody but a woman comprehends how the bottom seems to drop out of the stomach, and the heart follows after it into a great gulf of nausea and nothingness, when she is worried, or anxious, or grieved.”

“I want to know!” said John, who had New England blood in his veins. “You poor little kitten! But he—or she—has got the nervous wreck of a man down cold. ‘Cross, irritable, taciturn!’ hits straight from the shoulder. And how the meal to his liking—*that* would be a capital soup, a tiptop steak, seraphic scalloped potatoes, ravishing macaroni, and a bewitching cup of coffee—with the nicest, cleverest, sweetest woman in creation at the head of the table—makes a tolerable saint of him.”

The Distractions of Martha

Martha had no sense of humor, as I have remarked. Sound sense and an even temper kept her from being hurt at the anticlimactic adjectives. She was thankful that she was nice, clever and sweet after the experience of days which must ever abide in her memory as blots she would fain make blanks. The needle shook between her fingers; her feet, hands and heart grew cold in reflecting how near she had come to the loss of her husband's respect—perhaps of his affection. By his confession, the partial fast of forty-eight hours had reduced him to the verge of savagery. He might choose to forget the horrors of charred roast and uneatable croquettes in the present satisfaction. That they had told upon him was evident from the trend of his musings and moralizings.

A sickening sense of insecurity obsessed her. She had learned how to cook one dinner, but there must be a variety. Must she humble herself to lean from day to day upon Rosa Risley? If she would enter and maintain the queendom of Home, must she become as a little child?

John was a sound sleeper, and a dutiful husband, never opening his eyes in the morning until he was called just in time to dress for breakfast. He was, therefore, no wiser for the early visit of his wife's ex-colleague and present preceptor. It

John Eats and Moralizes

had been arranged the previous day that the second lesson—Rosa called it “clinical housewifery”—should be given at the ungainly hour of 6:30 A.M.

“Tom is away. Baby always sleeps until seven, and if she should awake, Mary will run up to her,” explained the “boss.” “I’m going to bring over some apples. A friend in the country sent me a bushel last week, and you are going to cook bacon and apples for breakfast. A dish fit for a king—or for your John, who, I insist and contend, isn’t to know one thing about this select class. I’ll slip out of my back door and into yours. Mary needn’t know why I come. I told her you were an old friend, and we were going to be very neighborly.”

True to appointment, the merry face appeared in the gray-and-blue kitchen. True to her promise, she never touched apples, bacon or any other part of the embryo meal. She did sit between work-table and stove, and direct Martha’s every movement. Her pupil was as apt as willing. To the unaccustomed task she brought the intelligence and quickness of apprehension of the mature thinker. Having done a thing once, she was in no danger of forgetting the least detail of the operation. Before she slept last night she had entered in her Household Record the

The Distractions of Martha

recipes for cooking each of the dishes her husband had praised as his saviors from savagery.

“Clever girl!” nodded Rosa, when Martha asked her to audit the formulas. “I wish I had half your brains! A child could follow those recipes. The tables will be turned in less than a year. You’ll be teacher, and I the scholar. The next time you have apples and bacon—and Tom’s away—I’ll show you how to make corn-bread. It is ‘bully’ with apples and bacon!

“Now—dish them, and set the dish, covered, over a pan of boiling water. It won’t hurt them to stand. The toast you can make after calling Mr. Purcell. Don’t forget to pare the crust off neatly. Even Mr. F.’s aunt wouldn’t eat toast-crusts. Sensible old party! I forgot you didn’t care for Dickens, and so have never made her acquaintance. We go to market at nine o’clock, and I’m to bring baby over at half-past five—did you say? Good-by!”

Undemonstrative Martha put her arms about the “boss,” and kissed her fervently.

“My good angel!” she murmured. “And some day—when I really know something—when I can walk without a crutch—I must tell John, and let him thank you, too!”

Before awakening him, the wife stood in the outer door, tasting the freshness of the autumnal

John Eats and Moralizes

day. The dew upon the sward of the lawn was delicately frosted; the hardy honeysuckle, which would bloom until the snow flew, shook clusters of scented bells in the breeze rising with the sun.

The well-read woman saw, felt and enjoyed it all. Yet as she tripped upstairs, elate in the consciousness that an orderly, tempting meal awaited the lord of her soul, this quotation was uppermost in her mind:

Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she may learn.

CHAPTER IX

ENTER BRIDGET

Mischief! thou art afoot.

Take, then, what course thou wilt!

SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Cæsar*.

THE October roses were abloom again in the corner of the little lawn, and the hardy honeysuckle bells swung in the crisp breeze. The wife of a year stood upon the piazza to watch the stalwart figure of her Commuter as he strode down the street toward the station. She was still an early riser, and she made punctuality at meals a point of conscience. John always had plenty of time to eat his breakfast, and the breakfast was worth the time he spent over it.

When he disappeared at the corner, turning there to wave his hat, Martha walked up and down the porch several times before going into the house. She looked happy, but thoughtful. Today would be an epoch in her domestic life.

An important functionary was to be installed—a “general house-girl,” in her own parlance;

Enter Bridget

in Martha's more refined phraseology, a "maid of all work." John had insisted upon it, and Rosa had warmly seconded his insistence, in view of a momentous Probability. Martha had yielded to the combined forces with her usual sweet temper and good sense. The crucial First Year of Wedded Life and Housewifery was safely over. Beginning, as her teacher enjoined, with the homely rudiments of her profession, she had mastered it, and in mastering, had learned to love it.

Her study of manuals was now *con amore*; from a copyist she had become a composer. John, stubbornly incredulous as to her original ignorance, was grateful to Rosa for bringing out his wife's talents and encouraging her to have confidence in her own abilities. He was passing proud of her management, and revelled in her culinary skill. The novitiate had been arduous. How full of trial, of failures, of downright suffering, none but those who have gone through the ordeal can imagine. Even John, quick of apprehension where his wife was concerned, had not suspected how near she was to a nervous breakdown in July—when, at Rosa's almost tearful request, he had permitted Martha to anticipate his vacation by a fortnight and go with Mrs. Risley and her baby to a mountain farm-house

The Distractions of Martha

in northern New Jersey. She told him, when he joined her there for his "two weeks off," that she had slept eighteen hours out of every twenty-four for the first seven days. In the light of the Probability mentioned just now, he supposed it was "perfectly natural." Rosa knew better, and was strengthened in her resolve to make her daughter learn from childhood what had been acquired by the woman of twenty-seven by bloody sweat and by heart-throbs.

"She shall come to her education by easy degrees, and not at the point of the bayonet and under the lash!" vowed the energetic little matron.

The Purcells were reckoned the most unsocial people in a neighborly community. Rosa heard much wondering, and some unkind criticism. She repeated neither to her overwrought friend.

"People would despise her if I were to represent that she is either too busy or too tired to make visits," she confided to her Tom. "She's got it all to learn, you see, and she is determined to learn it well. She does nothing by halves. She'll be a pattern housekeeper in time, if she can pull through the apprenticeship."

John was prospering in his business. John wanted to have his friends visit him in his own home. John had misgivings that his wife was

Enter Bridget

working beyond her strength. Every other woman in her set had at least one maid-servant. John didn't marry the cleverest woman in the United States of North America to make a bond-slave of her.

Strolling for five minutes in the honeysuckled porch, Martha acknowledged for the hundredth time that John had reason on his side.

All the same, she had a dread—uncomfortably akin to a presentiment of evil—of introducing a foreign element into her orderly *ménage*. Now that the strain and stress and friction of the study were over, her pride and her comfort in her beautifully ordered home grew stronger daily.

She went into the kitchen, and set about restoring it to order, with regret that was jealousy tugging at her heart-strings. She hoped and believed that she had made a judicious choice of a servant. It was unfortunate that Rosa should have been called to the bedside of her sick mother just when Martha set out upon the business of maid-hunting. The friend and pupil of the whilom "boss" had come to lean heavily upon her judgment. In her absence Martha had selected from a varied and not too tempting assortment of "specimens" in a city Intelligence Office, a woman of mature years, pronounced by her last

The Distractions of Martha

employer to be "thoroughly competent for general housework, willing, neat, industrious, honest—in short, all that could be desired in an efficient and trustworthy servant."

The handwriting and composition of the certificate were those of an educated woman. The address, written below, was "Mrs. Abner Charles Freeman, Valley View, Orange, N. J." Before engaging the treasure, Martha wrote confidentially to the late mistress, asking for further particulars. The reply was, if possible, more satisfactory than the original recommendation. The imposing personage who presided in the Intelligence Office "had known Bridget Connelly for years, and was sure Mrs. Freeman would not part with her were it not that she, with her family, was intending to winter abroad."

Martha's reluctance to introduce a hireling into the realm where she had, until now, reigned supreme, had, as she candidly admitted to herself, no better foundation than a sort of Doctor Fellish distaste to Bridget's personality. Her eyes were hard and gray; her lips were a set line, and she understood herself rather too well, answering respectfully in words, assuredly in manner, every question as to her qualifications for the place.

Martha's school-life had given her ample op-

Enter Bridget

portunity for practising the art of control of subordinates. She had no doubt as to her ability to keep Bridget in her place, and of insuring the faithful discharge of the duties she would allot to her.

“All the same,” she broke out again, as she closed the shutters to exclude the morning sunshine from the Symphony in Gray-and-Blue, “I *hate* the idea of her coming! If I were as well and strong as I was four months ago, I should not consent to it!”

She was of the same opinion still when ten o'clock brought Bridget Connelly and a distended valise.

“I make it a rewel never to fetch me trunk to a place till I know whether I'll loike it or no,” she said, as Martha glanced at her luggage. “Mrs. Freeman, she was thot anxious fer to give it house-room, I suspect she thinks she'll git me back ag'in before long.”

“I understood that she was going abroad at once,” remarked Martha, quietly.

“An' thot she is—nixt wake. But th' house-keeper is an ould friend av mine. She is turrible wishful fer me to stay an' be coompany fer her this winter.”

“You can find your room for yourself.” The lady pointed to the third story. “It's the first

The Distractions of Martha

on the left as you go upstairs. When you have changed your gown, come down, and I will give you orders for the day.”

It was an hour before the Treasure reappeared. She had on a stiffly starched purple calico skirt, a pink gingham shirt-waist and a white apron; her hair, which was streaked with gray, was combed back and knotted tightly on the top of her head. She was businesslike and uncompromising in attire and in mien. Martha preceded her to the kitchen, complacent in the persuasion that the newcomer would lower her flag of *nil admirari* superiority to cottage and inmates at sight of the Model.

“This is the kitchen!” with the quiet dignity she had maintained in catechising, engaging and receiving the maid. “You will find everything in perfect order, I think. I am very systematic. ‘A place for everything, and everything in its place,’ and ‘A time for every duty, and every duty in its time,’ are two excellent mottoes for mistress and maid. This, you see, is the pot-closet; this the crockery-pantry; here is the store-room”—stepping briskly from one to the other; “this the refrigerator,” and so on, until the rapid round included every “convenience” and “improvement.”

All was spotless, shining, artistic—as John

Enter Bridget

never wearied of affirming—"a picture of a place."

Bridget stood stock-still in the middle of the room, her hands folded upon her stomach, the hard, gray eyes following the alert movements of her nominal mistress, her face a hard blank.

"Now," said Martha, the introductory round completed, "you can get to work at once. Luncheon is a very simple affair, Mr. Purcell never being at home at noon except on Sunday. There is cold lamb in the refrigerator, and cake in the cake-box. Besides these, we will have bread and butter and tea. I make the tea on the table. So you will have a couple of hours in which to get acquainted with your new surroundings; to find out for yourself just what is here, and where. After luncheon I will give orders for dinner."

Then Bridget unclasped her heavy jaws, and spake with her tongue:

"'Twon't take me long to take account av stock, I guess. Things is all very clean, an' all thot, I *will* say, but thot limited-like I'll be most afraid to turn meself around fer a spell! An' I *will* say thot there's a dale av frills fer sech little room. It'll seem quare enough afther th' front an' back kitchen at Mrs. Freeman's. To say nothin' av a laundry's big as th' ground floor av your house, an' a butler's pantry twice th'

The Distractions of Martha

size av my bedroom upstairs. Howsomever, I'm willin' to accommodate meself to circoomstarnces."

She undid her hands from their hard lock upon the pit of her stomach, and moved toward the pot-closet, talking as she went, with the manner of one taking full possession.

"As you say, a body has to git use' to things. An' if so be I should find there's somethin' wantin' as I can't git along widout, I can call to you. You'll be in your bedroom, generally, I s'pose? I allers say it's well to have an onderstandin' from the first. It makes things easier all around. Her as is a rale leddy kapes to her part av th' house, an' th' gurrel, she kapes to hers."

She had her back to the astonished mistress, and was pulling saucepans and kettles about aimlessly, the loosened tongue going all the while:

"There is them what won't let Her step her foot into th' kitchen from wake's ind to wake's ind 'pon no account whatsoever, but says I, 'Thot's carryin' things a *leetle* too fur,' says I, an' so long as She knows her place, an' lets me alone in mine, there's no reason we shouldn't git on all right. Dear Mrs. Freeman, now, she knew no more about th' inside av her kitchen nor a baby unborned, as you may say. But you needn't worry! Once a day fer you to look in to save

Enter Bridget

me th' trouble av climbin' th' stairs won't break no bones. I have my rewels, but I ain't so rewelable as many, an' I'm thot aisy-tempered I know how to make allowances fer them as don't know so much. At dear Mrs. Freeman's I was allers th' peacemaker. Ah, but she was th' born leddy! I ain't expectin' to meet th' likes av her ag'in. No! no!"

She shook a mournful head into a farina-kettle, proceeding, meanwhile, to separate it from the companion outer vessel, and setting them upon different shelves.

Martha pulled herself together. Dismay had not soaked the stiffening out of her spirit.

"Please put that rice-boiler back as it was at first!" she said firmly. "The two belong together, and should never be used separately. That closet is in order. You will disarrange things if you make changes. As to what you have been saying, I shall always reserve to myself the right to come into my own kitchen as often as I like, and to keep every department of my housekeeping under my own eye. The house is my husband's, and everything in it. It is my duty to see that his property is taken care of, and properly managed."

Bridget restored two knotty hands to the pit of her stomach. They looked strong enough to

The Distractions of Martha

strangle the woman confronting her. Martha wondered afterward why the gruesome thought occurred to her just then.

“*Ah-h-h!*” shaking her head, with no show of resentment. “Dear Mrs. Freeman knew what she was talkin’ about when she said, ‘Bridget, dear!’ says she (she is always that affectionate wid me!), ‘Biddy, dear! I warn you, you’ll find it different livin’ wid a leddy thot’s never done a han’s turn av wurk in her loife, an’ one thot’s had to labor fer a livin’,’ says she. ‘It’s thot kind what’s hard upon them thot’s their aikuils in all but a bit av money,’ says she, th’ tears in th’ swate eyes av her.”

“There, Bridget, that will do!” interrupted Martha, still keeping temper and dignity. “The table is set for luncheon. Come into the dining-room and I will show you what dishes you are to use.”

This done, the mistress retired from the field in tolerable order, ashamed and angry at heart that the woman’s impertinence had stung her to the soul; mortified at her own impotence in dealing with ignorance, vulgarity and self-conceit; most of all, wondering what manner of woman had put the detestable combination into the house of a sister-woman.

The morning mail brought a letter from Rosa.

Enter Bridget

“I wish I could help you in the hateful, but necessary, operation of selecting a maid,” she wrote. “But, like being born, being married, and dying, it’s a thing you must do for yourself and *of* yourself. At the best, you buy a pig in a poke, and do it with your eyes shut at that. I offer one morsel of advice: Don’t, if you can help it, get a cook over forty years old. She’ll probably be either drunk or crazy—maybe both. Catch ’em young and bring them up to your hand.”

Martha folded the letter after reading it, and sat with it in her hand, looking out of the window with woeful eyes.

“That Horror down-stairs is forty-five if she’s a day! And I thought *that* an advantage!”

CHAPTER X

EXIT BRIDGET

If the world will be gulled, let it be gulled!

BURTON, *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

ONE nuggetlet of wisdom, passed into the keeping of her friend and pupil by Rosa Risley, was:

“Never refer a housekeeping problem to your husband until you have done your very best to solve it for yourself. It’s cowardly! And it isn’t fair unless you are willing he should unload his business worries upon you, and are able to help him out of them.”

Approving the sound sense of the advice, Martha had long ago ceased to cloud John’s home hours by domestic confidences except such as were pleasing, making much of successes, and holding her peace as to failures.

So it came about that the new mistress of the model American kitchen reigned absolute, and ramped unchecked, for four whole days after her usurpation. She was a tolerable cook. In his satisfaction in what he imagined was his wife’s

Exit Bridget

relief from drudgery, John praised everything, and refrained religiously from comparing his commonplace daily food with the dainty variety to which he had been accustomed under what he named "the former *chef*." Bridget had her "evening out" on Friday, beginning at 2 P.M., and lasting until midnight. She could not be in earlier, having been over to Orange to take dinner with Mrs. Freeman's housekeeper and to say "'good-by' to the blessed angel, who, God save her! was to sail next Tuesday."

Martha saw her go in gladness and singleness of heart, and gave up the rest of the day to arranging cupboards, closets and store-rooms, sadly disordered since they left her hands. Then she got up a supper that played upon John's gastronomic nerves as the sweet south wind upon an Æolian harp.

The contrast with the dinner served on Saturday evening tried his affectionate discretion to the utmost. Martha looked pale and tired, and was unusually silent. In masculine ignorance of what he would have resented had he suspected it—Bridget's lowering mood and surly snappishness throughout the day, and the effect of these upon his brave-hearted "little woman"—he set down pallor and preoccupation to physical discomfort, and made talk with sedulous vivacity.

The Distractions of Martha

“ Ah! Apple-dumplings!” he ejaculated, as Bridget—at whose darkly portentous visage he had never troubled himself to glance—thumped the dish on the table. “ I’ve always been of the same mind with the fellow to whom Coleridge ‘ orated ’ at a dinner-party for an hour, thinking he had a most appreciative listener. You recollect the story? How the fellow never unclosed his lips until the apple-dumplings were brought in. Then he slapped his thigh, and broke out with ‘ *Them’s* the jockeys for me!’ What’s up, my pet? ”

Martha sat, the image of dismay, surveying an ooze of uncooked dough issuing from the gash she had made in one of the sodden balls, preparatory to putting hard sauce into the heart. John always liked her to sauce his pudding before passing the plate to him.

She forced a piteous smile. “ I’m sorry, dear, but they are not *done!* You could not eat this!” as a deeper gash revealed the raw apple embedded in viscid whiteness. “ I don’t see how even *She* could have contrived such a mess,” forgetful of Rosa and her maxims. “ Darling! I am ashamed and mortified! The soup was wretched—no better than dish-water—the meat was burned to a crisp, the vegetables were watery and insipid—but these are worst of all!”

Exit Bridget

Artificial composure gave way before a big sob that tore her throat when she tried to suppress it.

When John dropped upon one knee to draw her head to his shoulder with fond murmurs of encouragement, she clung to him and cried, hysterically,—“ Oh, John! John! she is *dreadful!*”

In the hazy notion that her wits were wandering, the bewildered man rang the call-bell violently once—twice—thrice. Then, as there was no sign of the feminine help he craved, and Martha's sobs and gasps increased in vehemence, her hand clutching at that which held the bell, he laid her back in her chair, reached the door, which was ajar, at one stride, and shouted, “ Bridget! where are you? Mrs. Purcell is very ill! Hurry! hurry!”

Calm and stiff as an ice-needle, the Treasure emerged from the open kitchen door and halted upon the threshold of the dining-room, her arms akimbo.

“ I'm none surprised!” she amazed John, and terrified her mistress into a show of composure, by enunciating, raspingly. “ It's conscience—that's what it is! She has a right to be ashamed av sech doin's as I found this day, when I come back, wid me hairt fair broke wid th' pairtin' from that born leddy an' unborn angel, as you might say. Me kitchen, as I had spent th' better

The Distractions of Martha

pairt av three days a-settin' to rights so's a Christian body could fale easy into it—all upsot an' *darranged*. An' then to call me soup 'dish-wather!' HER—that was a wurkin' gurrel herself—what made her bit av money th' same as me—to fault her betters!"

"Hold your tongue!" ordered John, beginning to get into the meaning of a tirade that had been in an unknown tongue until the repetition of the criticism of the soup struck his ear. "How dare you speak so of a lady?"

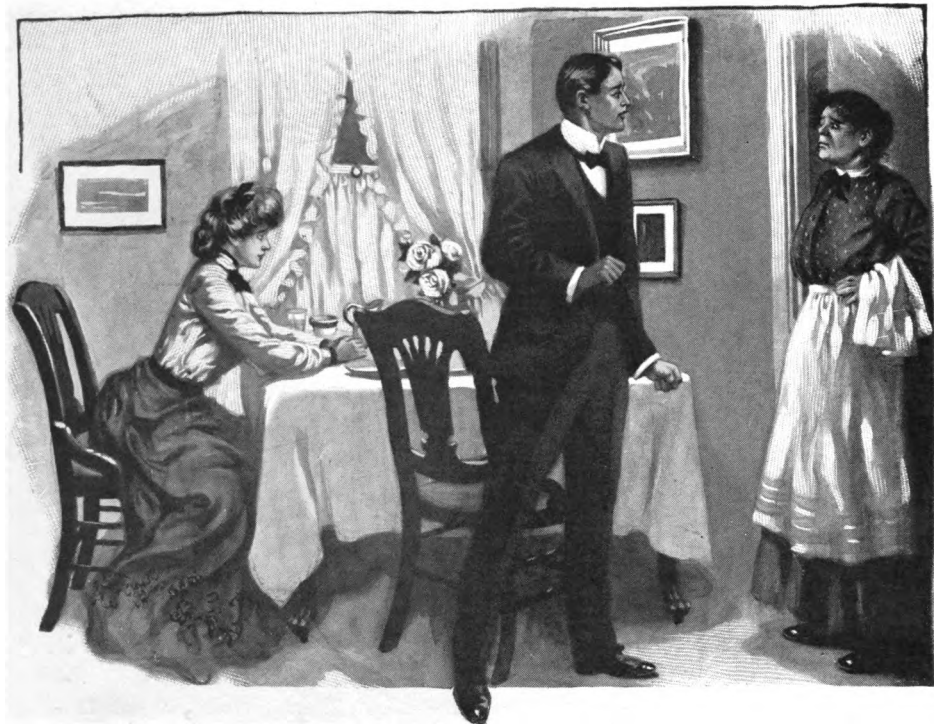
"Is *thot* what ye call her?" sneered the virago, still mistress of temper and tongue. And as he made a step toward her, "I wish ye *would* lay th' weight av yer hand on me! I'd hev th' law on yez!"

Seeing his wife motion convulsively toward a glass of water, John held it to her lips; his senses returned in force and in order. He patted the wet face uplifted to his, kissed the lips quivering in a poor attempt to frame an entreaty.

"You'll be all right now, as soon as I get this woman out of the house, dear,"—in gentle reassurance.

"'Woman'—is it you're afther callin' me?" struck in the Treasure. "There's law to be hed fer ugly wurds, too, I'll hev yez to know!"

Then—John laughed, and Martha joined in



"How dare you speak so of a lady?"

Exit Bridget

feebly and disjointedly, the climax appealing even to her sense of the ridiculous.

Bridget took fire. "This is what a dacent pair-son gits fer takin' service wid low-class——"

John's gesture cut her short. He drew out his watch.

"It is now a quarter of eight o'clock. Go upstairs and get your duds together, and be off! If you are not out of this house in fifteen minutes, I'll call for a policeman and have you locked up!"

He was surprised and Martha stunned when the woman turned away without another word, and they heard her steps clattering on the stairs.

"Oh, you *splendid* darling!" cried the enraptured wife, falling into his arms. "How grand you are! And how calm and strong! I should never have dared!"

"Nonsense!" returned the well-pleased lord of creation. "All that is needed in dealing with that kind is to practise a tolerable degree of firmness and presence of mind. You should have told me what she was before she had been in the house an hour. I should have made short work in righteousness——"

Martha caught his arm. "Hark!"

The clattering steps sounded again upon the stairs. They were coming down. Martha pinched her husband's arm hard.

The Distractions of Martha

“She is going to beg to stay! *Don't* let her, please, dear Jack!”

“I shan't! Don't be frightened!”

Bridget appeared in the doorway, bonneted and shawled, her valise, packed and strapped, in hand, her umbrella under her arm.

“I'm off, accordin' to yer orders!” she said, gayly. “Now fork over me wages, an' I'll never set foot inside yer door ag'in.”

John took out his pocketbook and extracted a bill.

“There's a week's pay, although you have been here but four days. Take it and begone!”

Bridget did not stir to take the proffered money. Cocking her chin impudently, she snorted derisively:

“Not if I know it! I'll hev me month's pay or nothin'—till I can hev th' law on yez. You're sendin' me off, bag and baggage, Saturday night—turnin' a dacent gurrel into th' street, fer no fault av hern. Th' law gives me me full month's wages, an' not a penny less will do me.”

John jumped up in a fury.

“You wretched humbug! It isn't enough that you have ruined my property, insulted my wife, and been abusive to me, but you want to rob me, too! Get out of my house, or I'll kick you out!”

It was so evident that he meant what he said

Exit Bridget

that the woman cowered for a moment, backing toward the front door as he advanced. When he strode past her and held it wide open with an involuntary twitch of the right leg, she marched out, chin in air and shouldering the umbrella musket-wise.

On the top step of the porch she wheeled to say, "Yez will hear from me on Tuesday—God willin'!"

By Tuesday morning's mail Mrs. Purcell had a formidable-looking envelope bearing the stamp of the Legal Aid Society—an admirable organization in its way, I digress to remark, and one with whose object and working Martha was pleasantly familiar from hearsay. With no prevision of aught unpleasant, she opened the type-written single sheet enclosed:

"MRS. J. E. PURCELL:

"DEAR MADAM:—Bridget Connelly states to me that you owe her \$20.00 for services rendered while in your employ.

"I shall be very glad to receive any explanation or information regarding this matter that you may choose to give me, either at my office personally, or by mail. Kindly answer before October fifteenth. On that day the applicant will return to consult me regarding further action.

"Very truly yours,

"C. P. K—,

"Attorney for the Legal Aid Society."

The Distractions of Martha

Martha laid the letter before Rosa, who had returned to her home, released by her mother's convalescence.

"It's downright robbery on the woman's part!" decided the referee. "But you'll have to pay it. If she had discharged herself before her month was up she would have forfeited her wages for the whole term. You sent her away. The rule works both ways.

"In the eye of the law this is both justice and equity. That's an eminently respectable and honorable society. They wouldn't take the matter up if there was anything crooked about the transaction."

"But—" Martha rushed into a recapitulation of the enormities of Bridget's brief administration, ceasing presently for want of breath.

"Granted!" said the other, sententiously. "Furthermore, she deliberately planned to make you discharge her. Her valise was all packed ready for her flitting. The dinner was spoiled for the same end. There are women in her class who have reduced that sort of thing to a science. It is their business. I knew of one who had ten places in three weeks, and got a month's wages from each. She cleared a tidy sum by the speculation."

Exit Bridget

“Incredible!” cried Martha. “Did none of her employers appeal to the law?”

“The law sustained her. She was dirty at one place, utterly incompetent at another, wasteful in a third; quarrelsome and impertinent in all—so disagreeable throughout that her victims were glad to send her packing at the end of the first twenty-four hours!”

“But the Intelligence Offices that recommended her? Surely they are responsible! It’s like palming off damaged goods upon customers.”

Rosa snapped her fingers in the air.

“Their responsibility doesn’t amount to *that!* They accept a reference from the last place, and no questions asked. It is *your* business to look up the former employer—and to sift evidence.”

“They ought to have agents to do this!” insisted honest Martha.

“And we ought to be angels, my dear! Which we are not likely to be while the ‘hired girl,’ who would leave if you called her a ‘servant,’ rules the roast—or roost, whichever it is.”

Martha was resolute in self-vindication:

“I wrote to the address given me at the office; I saw the ‘confidential’ memorandum on the books—a certificate from Mrs. Freeman pasted upon the page. Nothing could be more satisfactory, unless it were the letter she wrote to me. I

The Distractions of Martha

don't see what more I could have done to protect myself."

Rosa was in a brown study.

"I am inclined to think, with Betsey Prig, that 'there ain't no such a person as Mrs. Harris'—*alias* Mrs. Freeman. That's another trick of the trade. There are people who make part of their living by writing certificates for maids, and even for men who want better places than their actual records would get them. My brother, Dick Dunn, is a newspaper man. They have ways of finding out everything. I'll set him upon Mrs. Freeman's track."

John had just had a threatening lawyer's letter, and was brimful of fight, when she ran in, a few days thereafter, to report the result of the newspaper man's detective work. Mrs. Freeman was Bridget Connelly's sister, who, having been educated as a sub-teacher in a parochial school, could write and spell and compose grammatically. She had married a workman in an Orange hat factory, and they lived in a story-and-a-half cottage near the works. Her sister lived with her when "out of place," a thing which, the neighbors remarked, "happened quite often."

John carried this story and his own to the Intelligence Office next day. He was received suavely, heard attentively, and answered respect-

Exit Bridget

fully. When he had finished the tale, he was assured that Bridget Connelly's name should be expunged from the books of the highly respectable concern, and that she should never get another situation through the instrumentality of that office.

"Is that all?" queried John, hotly. "You leave her at large to apply at any other office and impose herself upon other unsuspecting families by means of a lying letter! It is infamous!"

The suave Manager shrugged her shoulders.

"It does seem unjust at the first blush. But we cannot set the world right. We do all in our power to advance the interests of our patrons. The wisest and most careful of us are liable to imposition."

By the advice of a legal friend, John paid the bill presented by Bridget Connelly—with costs.

The disbursement was entered thus in the Expense Book of the irate householder :

"To first lesson in American Household Service, \$25.50 (twenty-five dollars—fifty cents)."

CHAPTER XI

THEIR FIRST DINNER-PARTY

Every law
That men have made for Man
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

Ballad of Reading Jail.

DISGUSTED with Intelligence Office methods by her first experience, Martha chose as her second maid-of-all-work a woman who was permitted by her present employer to advertise from her house.

“That promises well!” quoth John. “Go into town this very day and see ‘the present employer.’ Make out a list of questions as long as the moral and ceremonial law, and put her faithfully through them all. Rake her fore and aft, and make sure she is not the ‘Treasure’s sister.”

This last point was settled to Mrs. Purcell’s satisfaction by the appearance of the house, a four-story brownstone front in West Eighty-eighth Street. Had she needed confirmation, the first sight of the mistress of the home supplied it.

Mrs. Bryce was a gentlewoman in look and

Their First Dinner-Party

bearing, sweet-faced and sweet-voiced, and amiably anxious that Catherine Moran should secure a good home.

“She has served me faithfully fourteen months as laundress and cook’s assistant,” she said. “She is neat, willing, good-tempered, sober, honest, and does her work well. She thinks the air of New York does not agree with her. She has had a great deal of headache lately, and her doctor advises a country life. On this account she is leaving me. I will call her in, and you can talk with her”—ringing the bell as she spoke.

“Is she delicate?” queried Martha, suspiciously.

Mrs. Bryce smiled. “You can judge for yourself. She has not lost a day’s time in the fourteen months. But, as I said, she has had trouble with her head now and then.”

Martha nodded intelligently. “I understand! Constitutional headaches! My mother suffered fearfully from them. She used to say that people who have them seldom have any other malady. And there is nothing better for them than change of air.”

Catherine’s entrance checked the discussion. She was fresh-colored, well-built, open-faced, well-mannered, and modest of speech. Mrs. Purcell was especially struck by the look of affec-

The Distractions of Martha

tionate gratitude turned upon her mistress as the examiner concluded the catechism by saying:

“Mrs. Bryce speaks so well of you that I am sure you will suit me, and that we shall get on well together. Can you come at once?”

Catherine curtsied, her lip trembled; tears rose to her eyes.

“Mrs. Bryce has always been too good to me, ma’am! I can come to-morrow.”

Mrs. Bryce’s eye glimmered through responsive mists.

“She is a good creature,” she added to her “Good-morning” to Mrs. Purcell. “And appreciative of kindness. A rare virtue in her class!”

The first month of the new maid’s incumbency bore out all that had been said by the former employer. She was an excellent cook, and better laundress; she loved work, and kept the whole house shining clean; she took to John at sight, and he to her, and further won the hearts of husband and wife by lively interest in the hopes and plans for the spring that engrossed much of the young matron’s time and thoughts.

The country air wrought beneficially upon Catherine’s health. In four weeks she had but one “bad headache,” and that was so considerate as to attack her one day when she had the house to herself, Mrs. Purcell being in the city shop-

Their First Dinner-Party

ping. By dinner-time the maid was upon her feet and sufficient to her tale of duties, albeit haggard in face and tremulous of hand. Observing which, her compassionate mistress sent her off to bed as soon as dinner was over, and cleared up dining-room and kitchen herself.

Next morning Catherine was again her brisk, notable self, and Martha congratulated herself anew.

“One cannot expect perfection in any servant,” she moralized to John. “If this one proves to have no worse drawback than an occasional headache, we are most fortunate.”

“Right you are!” John assented, heartily. “Thus far, my dear, you would seem to be in luck.”

Martha pulled his knee from its resting-place upon its fellow, and seated herself upon the perch thus offered, taking an ear in each hand to enforce his earnest attention.

“Do you know, John Purcell, what I have it in my mind to do, should Catherine hold out as she now promises to do? I mean to give a dinner-party. On your birthday, dear boy. A real dinner, *à la mode*, with courses and *entrées* and *hors-d'oeuvres* and all the rest of it. A party of six—three couples. The Fieldings, the Risleys, and our noble selves. Nothing pretentious, of course.

The Distractions of Martha

You and I believe, first, last and always, in even-threaded living. I can manage it, I am sure. I talked it over with Catherine yesterday. She took to the notion wonderfully. You saw how nicely she waited last week when the Risleys dined with us. And there will be only two more. That's one good thing about Catherine. She likes for me to have company. She says it 'makes the house lively, and is good for me,' too," looking away from him shyly. "She's an actual comfort in many ways. I only hope we can keep her."

Hope had ripened into peaceful assurance by the time the second month was well under way. Catherine was unaffectedly contented with her place, and increasingly desirous to please the mistress she served as such as freely as she spoke of herself as a servant. That was one of the many things Mrs. Purcell liked in her—a list that grew longer daily. The dinner-party was a fixed purpose. The Fieldings accepted cordially; the Risleys gladly. Rosa rejoiced generously in her friend's good fortune in securing a maid so nearly unexceptionable. Her Mary—one of the same kind—affiliated pleasantly with the new-comer. They held sweet counsel together on week-days and walked to the Roman Catholic Church in company every Sunday.

Their First Dinner-Party

Rosa's lively interest in the dinner reached the point of offering to leave the baby in charge of a cousin of Mary's on the important evening, while Mary came over to lend a hand with the dishes.

Catherine respectfully demurred. She was sure that she could get along alone. She had "often helped with big dinner companies at Mrs. Bryce's, and would like to show Mrs. Purcell how well she could do."

On the morning of the important Wednesday a great box of Japanese chrysanthemums was sent out from the city to Mrs. Purcell. Martha showed the card to her husband that evening.

"I am not ashamed to say that I couldn't keep the tears back when I read it," she said, her voice breaking even now.

"I don't blame you!" returned John, reading it aloud, slowly:

For Mr. and Mrs. Purcell,
"With the humble good-will and regards
of their attached servant, Catherine Moran!"

"There's the Irish Heart for you!" subjoined John, clearing his throat as his voice rose into a falsetto. "A thing we hear a great deal of, and meet very seldom. She's a good sort—that girl!"

The Distractions of Martha

His wife drew him into the dining-room.

Mrs. Bryce's table was never set more tastefully. From the candelabra, with their pink silk shades, to the single pink chrysanthemum of the same shade laid at each plate, the rest of the boxful clustering in a wide bowl upon the embroidered centrepiece—every detail was harmonious, and the effect altogether charming.

“Here is the *menu*,” resumed Martha, putting a paper into his hand, after John had said all this in effect and more.

He read it aloud, as he had read the card:

	Grape-Fruit	
	Ox-Tail Soup	
	Oysters à la Newberg	
	Chicken en Casserole	
Sweet Potatoes		Green Peas
	Lettuce and Tomato Salad	
	Crackers and Cheese	
	Frozen Pudding and Cake	
Salted Nuts	Olives	Celery
Bonbons		Fruit
	Coffee	

“Whew!” John looked scared. “I say, little woman! aren't you getting a little out of your depth? This sounds—one might say, positively palatial!”

Their First Dinner-Party

“I knew you’d say just that!” clapping her hands. “Now—John Easton Purcell! hearken unto your wife! *Every* dish there was prepared in this blessed, unpalatial cottage of ours—even the frozen pudding! Haven’t we a pearl of a cook?”

“And a diamond of a wife!” interpolated John, with appropriate action.

“And a husband whose price is above rubies!” Martha’s response was ready and fervent. “Oh, Jacky, darling! I think I was never so happy before as I am on this, your birthday. I have been repeating to myself all day a saying of Thoreau: ‘I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world, and in the very nick of time, too.’”

She wore her one real evening dress, pale pink brocaded silk, modestly *décolleté*, and trimmed with real lace. John told her he had never seen a prettier woman, and his eyes continued the story throughout the orderly progress of the meal. Rosa wore white silk, decorated with silver passementerie; Mrs. Fielding, black velvet and point-lace.

A well-appointed dinner-party is always picturesque to an artist’s eye. This one made a goodly picture, with the massed plumy blossoms,

The Distractions of Martha

the chastened lights, the shine of glass and silver upon the snowy cloth, the circle of elegantly attired revellers closed about it.

Catherine, the very moral of a neat-handed Phillis, in regulation black gown, bretelled apron, white collar, cuffs and cap, waited swiftly, noiselessly, and without a blunder, through five courses. The soup of her making was hot and savory; the oysters were a miracle of flavor; the chickens were smothered to a turn of brown juiciness; the mayonnaise would have done credit to a French *chef*. Martha, chatting gayly with Mr. Fielding, had not a misgiving as to the rest of the even-threaded feast, as she inclined her head slightly to the left to allow Catherine to set the frozen pudding—pink of complexion, melon-shaped, firm and smooth as alabaster—down in front of her.

At that instant a horrid cry—a gurgling screech—sounded in her very ear—something heavy, ice-cold and slippery, struck the back of her neck, rebounded upon the table, and landed in Rosa's lap, the gurgling and screeching going on the while with a scratching, clawing, rolling noise behind her, like the snarls of a fighting dog.

All were on their feet in a second; John and Mr. Risley sprang forward to lay hold of the

Their First Dinner-Party

writhing Thing on the floor behind the mistress' chair.

Somebody cried, "She has a fit!"

Quick-witted Rosa put both hands over Martha's eyes; Mrs. Fielding, with ready womanly apprehension, helped draw her out of sight into the hall, where Martha sank upon a chair, and fainted away.

The women attended to her as well as they could, without giving the alarm. They laid her upon the rug, loosened her bodice and bathed her face, hoping meanwhile that she would not revive sufficiently to hear and know where she was while the wild commotion went on in the inner room. It was a long fit and a strong fit, the strength of the three men proving inadequate to control the convulsed frame. The sufferer got hold of the table-cloth and dragged it down, rolling herself over and over in it amid the crash of china and glass, crushed flowers and iced water. Howling, fighting, biting and scratching, she was a fearful thing to see and to hear, a dangerous thing to handle.

Rosa left the swooning hostess long enough to telephone for a physician, giving an outline of the situation in terms so graphic as to bring him speedily to the spot. Without ceremony he gave a hypodermic injection of morphine, and as she

The Distractions of Martha

quieted down, sent for his coachman to assist in carrying the epileptic to her chamber.

Then he turned his attention to Mrs. Purcell.

A week later Mr. John Purcell's card was brought to Mrs. Bryce, as she sat placidly at ease in her sitting-room.

"That was the name of the people to whom poor Catherine went," remarked she to her daughter, making ready to see the visitor. "I'm afraid they have found her out!"

She was not, however, prepared for the stern gloom of the face that confronted her in the drawing-room. John was walking the floor restlessly, and declined the chair to which the urbane lady motioned him.

"No, thank you! My errand will be quickly done. I am here, Mrs. Bryce, to ask why you recommended the woman Catherine Moran to my wife when you knew her to be subject to violent epileptic fits. You knew her to be a dangerous inmate of any house, doubly dangerous when the mistress of the house, who is the only other person in the house all day long, is in a delicate state of health. Mrs. Purcell, suspecting nothing of the cruel fraud practised upon her, was shocked into a fainting-spell when the woman fell into a terrible fit at a dinner-party we gave a week ago. Convulsions followed the swoon. I hold

Their First Dinner-Party

you, madam, guilty of the death of my unborn child, possibly of my wife's. She is still critically ill. There should be a law to reach you. I am told there is none. I am told, too, that you are a Christian woman, with a reputation for amiability. Also, that you have daughters of your own. How could you reconcile it to your conscience to do this wrong to a fellow-woman? A woman who trusted you? By Heaven, madam! you would not be more guilty in my eyes and in the eyes of all sane, humane people if you had rolled a keg of gun-powder into my cellar with a slow fuse fast to it!"

Mrs. Bryce was crying. Her tears came easily, and she was frightened almost out of her senses by the fierceness of the unexpected assault.

"I am inexpressibly shocked and distressed at what you tell me!" she articulated between sobs. "I told my daughters that Catherine would do some mischief some day—poor soul! I kept her as long as possible, I was *so* sorry for her! and it was an affliction, not a fault, Mr. Purcell. The finger of God had touched her, as you might say. And she is as good a creature as ever lived. I have told the other servants so, times without number, but it got to that pass that none of them were willing to stay with her, for she couldn't

The Distractions of Martha

always be counted upon to have her bad turns in the back kitchen."

"So you foisted her and her fits upon your neighbors!" broke in John, savagely. "*There's* religion and the Golden Rule for you!"

"*But*, Mr. Purcell!" forgetting to sob in the earnestness of the appeal, "could I, as a Christian woman, with one atom of humanity, deprive an innocent, suffering girl, who means as well as ever mortal meant, of the only chance she can ever have to earn an honest living? If I had told Mrs. Purcell the truth, she would not have had the poor thing for one hour in her house. Nor would anybody else. There would be nothing but the street, or the poorhouse for her—as nice and industrious and sweet-tempered a girl as ever lived!

"Mrs. Purcell will recollect that I *did* give her a sort of warning. I told her Catherine was subject to headaches. And our family physician *did* say she would probably have fewer attacks in a quiet country place. My conscience is quite clear on that score, Mr. Purcell. Any kind-hearted person would have acted in the same way. I cannot bring myself to grind the faces of the poor, or to take the bread out of an honest laborer's mouth!"

CHAPTER XII

JOHN BRINGS HOME FRIENDS TO DINNER

With despatchful looks in haste
She turns on hospitable thoughts intent.

MILTON, *Paradise Lost*.

ONE of the pleasant customs that had grown out of the intimacy between the Purcell and Risley households was the morning marketing, done in company by the young matrons.

That women should do their marketing, and in person, was a necessity in Budfield, as in other suburban towns where commuters do congregate. From eight A.M. to five P.M. the streets were as void of well-dressed masculine humanity as the alleys of a convent garden. The few specimens of the *genus homo* left, like stranded shallows after a freshet, when the tide of life had ebbed in the arteries represented by the two main lines connecting town with city, were, for the most part, purveyors of provisions and keepers of what our English cousins call, "thread-and-needle shops."

"Very decent shops, too, so far as they go," Rosa was saying as the pair strolled along on the

The Distractions of Martha

sunny side of the street one crisp April forenoon. "Yet some women must run into town if they want a spool of No. 50 cotton, or a paper of darning needles. 'The New York habit' is as hard to break up as the opium, or cocaine, or Bridge Whist craze. My belief is that it is one's duty to live in, and for, the benefit of the community in which one pretends to have a home. Tom always votes in Budfield, and I deal here when I can get what I want. I wouldn't live in the city if I had an income of twenty thousand a year. Fancy bringing up my rose-bud of a baby in narrow stifling streets and a five-room apartment——"

The warm-hearted speaker cut the sentence in the middle on a rising inflection.

For Baby Rosie was growing daily in beauty and winsomeness, and Martha, who had had a critical illness and a "disappointment" last November, had turned her face aside, ostensibly to estimate the dimensions of a vacant lot over the way.

"As I was saying"—Rosa switched back upon the track she had left for a siding—"there is nothing to be had in the city that we can't get here, of as good a quality and almost as cheap."

"Except servants!" corrected Martha. "None of them like the country. It is nothing short of

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

a miracle that Rebecca has condescended to stay with us thus long. Every month, when I pay her, my heart stands still with fear lest she should say, 'I'm thinking of leaving now my month is up. I find it that lonesome out here.' As one girl told me when I mentioned we lived here the year 'round—'You see, we're flesh-and-blood, the same as yourself, if we do have to work for a living, an' 'tain't in human nature not to want to live where there's something going on.'

"It is strange there is no law obliging mistress and maid to give a month's, or at least a week's notice before parting company."

"It *would* be strange if there were not so many queerer things connected with what we miscall our System of Domestic Service," quoth Rosa, shrewdly. "Rebecca gets on very well with you, doesn't she?"

"That's the right way to put it! The question is not—'Am I pleased with Rebecca's works and ways?' but—'Can she put up with mine?' She enters upon her fourth month to-day. As she gave no sign of dissatisfaction when I paid her wages after breakfast, I suppose I am safe for another month. She has some good qualities. She is very neat and methodical, almost to a fault, requiring little oversight. When she came to me she said: 'All I ask is to know what my duties

The Distractions of Martha

is, and then to be let to do 'em.' She cooks well, is a good laundress, and a fair waitress. I do most of the chamber-work myself, and dust the drawing-room and library, she doing the sweeping and heavy cleaning."

"Between you, you keep your house in a state of spick-and-spaniness that makes me blush for my happy-go-lucky ways," said generous Rosa. "But you are always thorough in whatever you undertake."

They turned into the "Family Market" patronized by both. "Tom" was off upon one of his many business trips, and the grass-widow bought four chops. Without suspecting it, she affected the foreign fashion of buying food in quantities just sufficient for the day's consumption.

"It is all very well for women who write for the papers to tell poor people how economical it is to buy by wholesale," she had said to Martha on the way. "They say one of them has written a whole pamphlet called, 'What to do with the Cold Mutton.' I know what one husband would do with it when it turned up, smiling, for the fourth time, considerably disfigured by overcooking, but still in the ring. He'd shy it out of the back window! I haven't a word to say against such dainty *entrées* as you get up out

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

of next-to-nothing, but with the average cook a made-over is usually a make-shift and a mistake."

Even she stared when Mrs. Purcell ordered a lamb's liver, for which she paid ten cents, handing out eight cents more for half-a-pound of pickled pork, and two cents for a bunch of soup-herbs.

The notable housemother was not superior to the innocent vanity of amusement at her friend's bewilderment, and explained complacently when they were again on the sidewalk.

"John likes made dishes—when I make them"—harmless vanity becoming yet more apparent. "Both of us are fond of liver *en casserole*. Lamb's liver is as good for this purpose as calf's liver—we think better, and costs one-fifth as much. I shall have soup, a salad, and two vegetables, blanc mange, cake and coffee. Come over—since Mr. Risley is not at home—and see what a royal dish can be served up for twenty cents, leaving enough for mince on toast for to-morrow's luncheon."

After a little more merry talk the invitation, given half-jestingly, was accepted in good earnest, and the friends parted at the corner nearest the Purcells with the prospect of a speedy meeting.

The Distractions of Martha

Martha carried home a light heart and smiling lips that hummed a snatch of one of John's favorite songs as she fitted the latch-key in the lock. Her cottage was, as Rosa had said, neat and orderly to a degree that impressed the senses of the most casual observer upon entrance. The polished floor of the hall and the oaken stairs shone like dark mirrors; through the open doors to the right and left one had glimpses of pretty furniture tastefully disposed, of snowy curtains and richly colored rugs, all seen dimly but effectively in the *chiaro-oscuro* of bowed shutters tempering the broadest rays of the April sunlight.

Like tranquillity and even-threadedness reigned in the gray-and-blue kitchen. Rebecca had finished her morning "redding up," and sat in a rocking-chair by the window, darning a thin place in a glass-towel. The action and her air of thrifty contentment touched Martha's heart. The somewhat prim Phillis, neat-handed and light-of-foot though she was, had never really appealed to her employer's sympathies before. She was always kind of speech and manner to her hirelings, but there was friendly cordiality now in voice and word:

"How cosey and nice you look in here, Rebecca! I thought, as I came in, what a pleasant picture you would make, sitting there in your

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

neat blue gown and white apron. You and the kitchen suit one another so well!"

The maid had not risen at Mrs. Purcell's entrance. Something more than early training is required to drill the imported article in the minor courtesies of association with superiors in station, learned as soon as British peasants can walk alone, and kept in continual exercise until they come to a land where every man is a little better than his neighbor. Rebecca had lived in "nice families" before taking service with our heroine, but it would have been a bolder mistress than Martha, or any one of her congeners, who should venture to remind the woman of any lapse from decorum. She owned to twenty-five years of age. It was charitable, according to John, not to add more than ten years to the quarter-century. She had been in America eight years, having "come over when she was a slip of a lass."

She went on composedly with her darning while Mrs. Purcell gave an account of her marketing, and ordered her usual simple luncheon. Rebecca would have died sooner than admit to her nearest of kin and closest confidante that she had an easy place. Least of all, would she have made any concession to that effect to the person whose desire to instill the belief into her mind was obvious in every action and look in the daily

The Distractions of Martha

living they had together. Consistent to the tradition of her guild, Rebecca betrayed no sign of gratification at the compliment to herself and her surroundings. She was never sulky, or cross. Her *rôle* was that of the hired machine, and, as she would have phrased it, she "had no use for blarney." In the secret of her narrow soul she supposed that Mrs. Purcell wanted to "make something out of her," whenever she bade her a bright "good morning," or commended her work, and was continually on the lookout for the attendant imposition. She reckoned herself as a model in her line, and Martha would not have disputed the claim. She was tidy, sober, honest, respectful, industrious, faithful in the performance of every duty nominated in the verbal bond between her and her employer. If, as Martha said every day to herself and occasionally to Rosa—never to John—the girl showed no symptom of human interest in anything or anybody in the household of which she was temporarily a part, what difference did that make so long as the work she was engaged to do was turned off in good style and time?

She was rehearsing this query mentally for the fiftieth-and-first time, comparing Rebecca's stolidity with poor, epileptic Catherine's affectionate assiduity, and berating her own unreasonableness

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

while she laid aside her hat in her own room, when the "Ting! ting! ting!" of the telephone bell in the lower hall caught her ear. Before she could reach the foot of the stairs, the teasing iteration told her that the message was imperative, or the operator in a bad humor.

John's familiar voice reassured a spirit slightly ruffled by the importunate summons:

"Oh, it is *you!* I thought it was an alarm of fire!" answered his hail—"Hello! Patty! I've got you—have I?"

His message was important. Two business acquaintances from Richmond, Virginia, had called at his office and he had asked them out to dinner that evening—the one spare night they would have in New York. He would bring them with him at six-forty-five.

The sensitive wire must have been jarred by the energy of the ejaculation.

"*Oh, Jack!*"

"Yes, pet! I know it is confoundedly sudden, and it doesn't seem fair to spring a dinner-party in this way upon the best housekeeper in the world. But, indeed, I could not get out of it! You see, I have been entertained at both of their houses—and, to tell the truth, I had no idea they would be willing to go into the country just for a family dinner. They 'hoped Mrs. Purcell was

The Distractions of Martha

well,' and I said, 'Won't you run out this evening and take pot-luck with us?' And they jumped at the invitation. I say, little girl! don't put yourself out for them! Let them have what you were going to give me. I've often said that you act upon the principle that what is good enough for your husband is good enough for the President. Just put on two more plates! They are jolly fellows—free-and-easy as an old shoe. Oh, I say, Patty! they need not know that we have a telephone. I'll let them fancy that I do this sort of thing any time. They do at the South, you know. Don't worry your sweet soul over nothing. I'll be proud to have them see my wife and our home."

It was not in wifely heart to resist the loving, deprecatory pleading. Martha's annoyance melted in detecting the nervous agitation the loud swagger did not drown. He should see what reason he had to be proud of and to trust in her.

"All right, love!" she called back, gallantly. "What is the use of having a real home of your very own if you can't ask your friends to visit you whenever you like? I'll do my best, and I'll be glad to know the two jolly fellows. I'll have the spare room all ready in case you should wish to keep them over-night. They can't stay?"

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

Well, they can go up there to wash their hands and brush off the dust. Don't thank me, darling! It's nothing! Oh, nonsense! there are hundreds of thousands of other women who do just the same and better. Good-bye!"

Before leaving the telephone, she rang up her provision merchant, and ordered a pair of fat young fowls for roasting, also spinach and celery. Next, the confectioner was interviewed, and the florist. Finally, she walked back into the kitchen, flattered by the consciousness of heroic resignation to the inevitable, and of her executive ability, into positive enjoyment of the unexpected complication forced upon her.

As at her mistress' former appearance, Rebecca had kept her seat and gone on with her sewing. This time she did not look up, even when Mrs. Purcell stood within three feet of her. Martha would not believe her intentionally impertinent. She had had no reason to think her bad-tempered. The woman was ill-mannered for the want of proper discipline in the first places she had had in America. Her very far-back former employers had been remiss in their duty to the domestic, to themselves and to their order. Martha was beginning to detest former employers as a class. This, while she had no mind to undertake any training on her own account. The

The Distractions of Martha

manners of maids who "own up" to twenty-five, are, like Dora Copperfield's mind, "already formed."

The mistress spoke pleasantly:

"Rebecca! We will have to make a change in our arrangements for meals to-day. Mr. Purcell has just telephoned that he will bring two gentlemen out with him to dinner this evening. I have ordered a pair of chickens and some spinach and celery. The tomato soup we were going to have for ourselves will do perfectly well, also the rice croquettes and whipped potato, and the salad. I have ordered ice-cream, fruit and salted nuts. We will not undertake anything like a dinner-party. Mr. Purcell invited his friends to a family dinner."

Rebecca's scissors lay upon the table beside her. Yet she bit off her thread, and to do it, stooped to the towel she lifted to her mouth. Then she spread the mended linen upon her knee and smoothed the darn assiduously.

"It's strange he waited so long before telling ye of his intention!" she said, dryly, her Scotch accent more pronounced than Martha had ever heard it before.

"He knew nothing of it himself!" She was ashamed at the time, and angry later, that she spoke in conciliatory haste. "These gentlemen are

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

from the South, where people are so hospitable that they think nothing of off-hand invitations. Mr. Purcell has been entertained at their houses upon short notice."

Rebecca began to fold the towel, laying the hems together by a circumspect thread; the line of her lips was straight and tense.

"I've aye heard that that Southland folk had stickit ways with them!"

Martha flushed to her temples. Her tone was coldly dignified:

"We will not discuss other people's ways and manners. As I said, Mr. Purcell will bring two gentlemen to dinner to-night. I will see to setting the table after my luncheon. You need not do anything in the dining-room until dinner is served. The things I have ordered will be here soon. If they are not sent in good season, let me know, please."

"I wull!" The reply had the effect of being bitten off as the thread had been.

The flowers arrived before twelve o'clock, and from an upper window Martha had seen the familiar oblong market-basket with the as familiar undersized boy under it, swagger in at the side gate an hour earlier. Her mind was therefore at ease as to the preliminaries of her dinner, as, having finished her simple luncheon, she

The Distractions of Martha

cleared the table to spare her maid the trouble, and began to arrange the flowers in a cut-glass bowl for the centre-piece, laying aside four choice rosebuds for *boutonnieres*. In the midst of the task she heard the door-bell ring sharply and long. There would be no callers at this hour, and, recollecting that she had not seen Rebecca in the kitchen when she carried out the tray of soiled luncheon dishes, Mrs. Purcell answered the peremptory summons in person, a rose and a spray of fern in her hand.

“Trunk!” said a shirt-sleeved man who stood without, wasting no time in salutation or other preamble.

An express-wagon was at the gate.

“You have come to the wrong house,” said Mrs. Purcell, almost as curtly. “There is no trunk here to be taken away!”

Her motion to shut him out was foiled by a thick-soled boot thrust across the threshold.

“Order here, O. K.,” taking a book from under his arm and whirling the leaves. “’Phoned at 11:30 A.M., ‘Call for trunk 231 Hackmetack, corner Elderberry, at two o’clock—sharp! Rush order!”

“Right ye are, young mon! Coom up here for the trunk!” grated Rebecca’s voice from the stair-head.

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

He obeyed, taking two steps at each leap, whistling shrilly as he mounted.

With the last throes of expiring dignity, Mrs. Purcell went back into the dining-room and closed the door after her. Her trembling hands, colder than the water in which she was setting the stems, were mechanically busy with the flowers when Rebecca walked in, without the idle ceremony of knocking. She was dressed for walking, even to hat, jacket and gloves.

"I thocht it might be weel to say 'Good day' to ye," the broadening native accent her only sign of unusual emotion. "I wush ye weel, I'm sure, and I winna fash ye to write a reecommendation. They've kenned me at the office for sax year, and more. I've been none sae settled in my mind for a time back, and since pairt we must, better soone than syne, as the saying is."

Mrs. Purcell looked steadily into the woman's eyes:

"What does this mean? Certainly not that you are going away without giving me any warning, and without any cause of complaint? Going, too, when I am expecting company, and when you know I can get no help at such short notice! I cannot believe that a woman who has any conscience could act in such a manner. No! don't sit down!" she was brave enough to add as

The Distractions of Martha

Rebecca moved toward a chair. "Stand where you are and give an explanation of your extraordinary behavior!"

"Extraordinair—is it?"

Instinctively she set her big hands in rest upon her hips, the elbows at sharp angles. The attitude in the fighter feminine is equivalent to tearing off one's coat and rolling up one's sleeves in the fighter masculine.

"Extraordinair—did ye say? And what wad ye call such *condooct* as having a hoosefool and rinnin' over in company from week's end to week's end, and never consooltin' a puir working woman and fair wearin' her awa' to skin and bone—wha hae naething but her health and her twa hands to depend upon to win an honest leevin'? Maybe ye dinna mind how mony veesitors—I dinna mean *callers!*—but eaters of victual cooked by me hands and frae platters and china washt by me hands—ye've had sin the New Year? Maister Purcell hae brought twa o' his friends to pass the Sabbath, and twa nichts and a day each time, and Maister and Maistress Risley has been twice to dinner, and herself three times to luncheon, and the Laird Almichty knows how many times to tak' afternoon tea wi' ye, to say nowt of ane afternoon reception when as mony as fifty folk cam' strambling into the hoose—and na a word

John Brings Home Friends to Dinner

ever spak to ME, as to me conveenience, or one penny added to me wage!

“I’m not one to talk muckle of me woes at any time, but I’ve tak’ notes of it a’, and made up me mind that the nex’ time wad be the end of it a’. And if it war my last breath I’d mak’ use of it to say that it is not the pairt of a gentleman to bring a pack o’ men home whenever he feels the deesposition to do sae——”

“There! not one word more!” Mrs. Purcell raised a level arm and pointed a level finger that did not tremble, at the door. “Go! at once! I shall report your behavior and your language at the Intelligence Office. Will you go—and with no more impertinence—or shall I telephone to the police-station for help to clear the premises of you?”

She walked—still steadily—past the offender who sputtered Scotch billingsgate in her ear in following her to the front door. Martha set it wide open, holding the knob in her right hand, the left repeating the gesture of ejection—and as soon as Rebecca’s skirt was clear of the sill, closed it without rattle or bang, the dignity of the house-mistress inviolate to the last.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE IDEAL WAITRESS"

I am not of that feather to shake off
My friend when he must need me.

SHAKESPEARE, *Timon of Athens*.

AT four o'clock she was giving the new chapter in her varied experience with the *genus* "Living-Out-Girl" to Rosa Risley. She was not, as we have seen, weak, or timid, or hysterical, but a woman of exceptional nerve in the right acceptation of the word, fertile in expedients and endowed with unusual executive talent.

"I have not run to you with a bruised finger in my mouth!" she said to her friend when the first part of the tale was told—composed in nerve and in appearance, unless the pink spot in each cheek indicated emotion and was not caused by a lively hour-and-a-half of culinary manœuvres.

"How handsome you are!" interpolated irrelevant Rosa, here, touching one of the pink spots with a tentative forefinger, apparently to find out if it would rub off.

Her inquiring glance at the tip of her finger

“The Ideal Waitress”

after the touch, was expressive and irresistible. Martha laughed in spite of her worries.

“What a foolish child *you* are!” said she, but not ill-pleased. “I was never less in the humor for listening to flattery. I have too serious matters on hand. As I was trying to say, I hoped I had done with casting all my domestic burdens upon your willing shoulders. And I have really done all that I can do at present. The table is set to the last fork and spoon; the fowls are ready for cooking, the vegetables, ditto; the rice croquettes are on the ice; the salad lacks nothing but the mayonnaise, which is also in ice. I have cooked too many dinners *toute seule* to be disheartened by the thought of one more. *But*—and a ‘but’ as high as heaven and black as night!—I cannot preside at my table and be waitress as well. Courses must be changed, and they won’t go out and come in, automatically. By the time the click of Rebecca’s heels had died away in our street, I telephoned to the Woman’s Lunch Club in Twenty-third Street to see if I could hire a waitress for the evening. You know I have done it twice before this year and secured the nicest kind of a girl. As ill-luck would have it, not one is disengaged. Then, as a desperate hope, I tried an Intelligence Office. Of course none could be had on such short notice——”

The Distractions of Martha

“ I’d send over Mary with a heart-and-a-half,” interrupted Rosa—“ but her face is swelled out of shape by an ulcerated tooth. She had it out yesterday, but the swelling has not gone down. Her cheek flaunts all the colors of the rainbow—that is, as much of it as shows above the bandage. If she could wear a mask, now ! ”

“ I could not think of her working while she is in such a state—poor girl ! ” returned Martha, sincerely. In the secret sinking of the modicum of courage she had brought to the interview, she recognized the death of a hope she had hardly acknowledged to herself. Mary was a thoroughly faithful girl and had testified in many ways to a share in her mistress’ liking for Mrs. Purcell. It was a blow that she should be *hors du combat*, at this particular time. Martha’s thoughts returned with actual rancor to recalcitrant Rebecca :

“ The creature knew she was lying when she complained of the extra work put upon her by the little company we have had since she came to me ! As I said, I have had a regular waitress in twice—once, when I gave my afternoon reception—which was not a large affair, as you know, and once over Sunday, when John’s Boston friend, Mr. Duncan, was with us, and I had a touch of the *grippe* that prevented me from

“*The Ideal Waitress*”

doing as much housework as usual. I have made it a point of conscience to take upon myself the brunt of any additional labor entailed by visitors. It seemed only just, since they were there for my pleasure and not for my maid's.”

“She didn't think to mention that you have never objected to her extra outings,” added Rosa, in fine sarcasm. “Nor allude delicately to the time when Mr. Purcell bought circus tickets for her and a friend who ‘happened in’ the day the big show came to town, and how you had a light supper, instead of dinner, on another evening when you found that she was invited to a dance, and washed the dishes and put them away yourself, that she might have plenty of time to rest and dress. Nor how, when she brought the *grippe* into the house, you insisted upon her keeping her bed for two days, and nursed her yourself, besides doing her work and your own while she was laid up?—Yes! and there's where you got the ‘touch’ you spoke of just now. *You* didn't lie by for an hour, and hired a waitress at three dollars a day to help Rebecca—the ungrateful wretch! When people are balancing accounts they should keep an eye upon both pages of the ledger, and not set down what *they* owe to profit and loss!”

The Distractions of Martha

Having harangued herself out of breath, she pulled up hard and abruptly:

“But all this isn’t business! Do you go home, and keep a quiet mind! I think I know where to lay my hand on a waitress—one I’ve had in, now and then, to help me. She isn’t much to look at, but she can work and understands her business. I’m sure I can get her. If you don’t hear from me by six o’clock you may know that all is right. In fact, I’ll let you know by five if I can’t get Norah O’Halloran.”

“Rosa! you are my good angel—my providence! But for you my married life would have been but a rank failure. I told John so only last night——”

Rosa’s plump hand went over the speaker’s mouth, and one plump arm about her neck.

“And John told you as I do now—and as I have told you a hundred times—that such talk is downright *rot!* Tommy-rot, in fact! You don’t like full-bodied slang, but nothing else goes so straight to the point, sometimes. You had it in you to become a tip-top, A. No. 1 cook and house-keeper, and you would have worked out your own salvation in time. I gave you a lift in the primary department. That was all.”

“And in every other grade! Don’t understate the amount of my debt, dear! But this matter

“The Ideal Waitress”

of company, now! The Servant Question is a series of startling surprises to me. Ought I to ask my maid's permission before I venture to invite a friend to a meal in my house?”

“No, and yes!” The wrinkles in Rosa's forehead denoted profundity of thought. “Your house is your own, and when, as you say, you take all the extra work of company upon yourself, you have a right to have a friend in to every meal of every day in the week if you like. But it cannot be denied that three, instead of two people at table, increases a servant's work, and much coming and going throws a methodical girl out of her groove, as it were. She has laid out her work for the day, and any change in the programme is a jolt to her ideas and temper. Having little mind to speak of, as a rule, and a sharp eye to her own interests, she resents the jolt.

“I am hardly a fair judge of your case. Mary and I consult over everything pertaining to the house—from the daily left-overs in the refrigerator to Rosie's newest tooth. And she likes for me to have company. But I don't think your experience is very singular. I have heard of big houses where ‘a staff’ is kept, in which such catastrophes occur, now and then. One woman I know was deserted by a cook, butler and two

The Distractions of Martha

maids within an hour of her daughter's wedding."

"And there is no redress?" cried Martha, aghast.

"None, my dear! She could withhold the rest of their month's wages—but I have noticed that these upheavals are usually timed soon after the injured creature's month is up and her wages have been paid. *Must* you go?" Martha was on her feet. "The kettle is boiling and a cup of tea will put heart into both of us. Not that you ever need it, and the more I think of it the surer am I that Norah O'Halloran will serve your turn."

Martha's eyes sparkled with affectionate gratitude over the steaming cup filled and put into her hand before she could finish her refusal.

"And *you* will come over early? You were to test the liver *en casserole*, you know."

Rosa pursed her lips doubtfully:

"Maybe! No, dear, I think I would better let the invitation lie over until another time. Now, don't worry! I know the chickens will be done to a turn, and your spinach *à la crème* is a *dream*, always!"

Five o'clock passed without a word from the faithful friend in need. Martha had wrought in good heart all the afternoon. Now that the

"The Ideal Waitress"

tough problem of the waitress was transferred from her mind to Rosa's, she found profound satisfaction—as many another maid-beridden housewife has before and since—real, joyful, reliefful comfort—in having once more unlimited range in her own house. Rebecca, she perceived, had been a repressive influence, not acknowledged by her nominal mistress while it pervaded the well-ordered premises, yet felt in every department of work. In the kitchen Martha moved with freedom that was gayety, handled pots and saucepans and covered roaster almost lovingly.

She actually sang in stepping lightly to and fro from range to table; sunshine, cross-barred by the budding sprays of the honeysuckle veiling the western windows of the kitchen, danced upon the blue-and-gray arabesques of the floor, twinkled upon the silver of tureen and vegetable dishes, and gleamed mildly over orderly heaps of china, set in array upon the tables.

Six o'clock tinkled from the officious time-chronicler on the shelf between the windows. Norah O'Halloran would be here soon.

"I have great faith in Jolly!" said the busy worker aloud, and laughed low and happily in recalling one of Rosa's many illustrative stories.

A traveller in the West, early in the century,

The Distractions of Martha

came to a mud-hole so deep he had to swim across. Mid-way he espied a hat, apparently afloat, and picked it up.

“I will trouble you to put my hat back!” said a head revealed by the action.

“Swimming, too?” queried the fellow passenger.

“No, but my horse Jolly is. I’m on his back. Jolly and I have been through worse places than this. He’ll bring me out all right. I have great faith in Jolly!”

The side-door of the kitchen was open, the afternoon being sunny, and as the words escaped Mrs. Purcell’s lips, a shadow fell into the room; a timid knock prefaced a respectful little cough. A trig figure stepped across the threshold when Martha turned. It wore the conventional black gown, white apron, bretelled over the shoulders, and fastened by a big bow and flowing ends at the back of a round waist; a jaunty cap with a peaked, starched crown, was set above demure bands of red hair framing a rosy face. In advancing she dropped a curtsy in the Old World fashion.

“Come in!” said Martha, in cordial approval of the apparition. “Mrs. Risley sent you, I suppose?”

“Yes, mem!” Two plump hands smoothed

“The Ideal Waitress”

down the front of the white apron. “Norah O’Halloran, at yer service, mem!”

Accent was in perfect keeping with manner and name—yet Martha let fall her dish-cloth, and stood rooted to the floor, staring at the speaker, the half-formed words of welcome dying upon her tongue. A broad smile broke over Norah O’Halloran’s face; the roguish flash of her eyes betrayed her further.

“Rosa — Dunn — Risley!” ejaculated her friend, half dismayed and wholly astonished. “You don’t imagine for one minute that I would let you——”

Rosa’s arms were about her neck, and a kiss stopped her mouth.

“I imagine nothing! I *know* that I am going to wait on your table this blessed night, and enjoy the frolic! You will, too, when you enter into the spirit of the masquerade. Nobody knows a thing about it but our two selves. I put Baby to bed and dressed and ran off without showing myself to Mary. She knew I was to dine with you, and won’t expect me home until ten o’clock and after. And your John won’t know me from any other Biddy. I’ll guarantee that. The best of men are *such* moles! I was Norah O’Halloran in private theatricals a couple of years ago. That’s how I came by the wig. ‘Wot larks!’”

The Distractions of Martha

“But do you really think”—faltered Martha, her wits still afield.

“I don’t ‘think’ at all! I just *know* that I mean to have my own way in this matter!” in bewitching imperiousness. “Now, tell me in two minutes about courses and china, and then run away and dress. You have no time to waste in useless talk. ‘Have faith in Jolly!’ I overheard you say that while I was standing on the steps trying to arrange Norah O’Halloran’s features before I ventured in. You wouldn’t have known me if I hadn’t laughed. I sha’n’t laugh while I’m waiting on the table!”

John’s dress-suit lay upon his bed, ready for him to put on when he had showed his guests to a room where they could lay aside overcoats and brush off dust. Martha had met them in the lower hall and gratified the proud husband by appearance and demeanor. She wore a cream-white gown which he especially liked; her hair was becomingly arranged; her complexion was girlishly fresh; her eyes shone with soft gladness in welcoming John’s friends.

“Model wife and model homemaker!” he said, between kisses, as she met him in their room. “I could see that the fellows were immensely struck at sight of you—and no wonder! Not one woman in fifty thousand would give such a recep-

“The Ideal Waitress”

tion to her husband’s acquaintances if he brought them home with him on such short notice. But you aren’t like other women!”

Laughing and blushing, Martha slipped in her word:

“Jack, dear! I thought it best to get in a waitress for the evening, supposing you wished to have everything in the best style for Virginia men.”

“Right—my darling—as you always are!” too busy with cravat and collar to note her slight flurry of speech and heightened color. “Run along, now, and entertain the fellows when they come down. I’ll be along in a jiffy.”

The family dinner, prefaced by grape-fruit, halved and capped by maraschino cherries, went smoothly as to cookery and service, cheerily as to talk. Every dish was admirable of its kind, and the whole affair quietly elegant without pretension.

As Rosa had anticipated, the host did not once look her in the face, accepting her and her services as naturally as he partook of the food she passed. Seeing this, Martha’s cheeks cooled and her heart resumed its normal action. She took her part in the lively conversation readily and easily, prudently avoiding meeting the masquerader’s eyes and never giving an order. There

The Distractions of Martha

was no need that she should. Watchful, deft and noiseless, the maid played her part to perfection, changing courses, passing back and forth from dining-room to kitchen like a shadow, ever alert to supply a possible want, swift without bustle, serious and intent.*

“An ideal waitress!” sighed Martha, mentally. “Why cannot we hire such?”

The thought was startled out of her mind by a question put to John by one of the Southerners:

“By the way, Mr. Purcell, do you chance to know Tom Risley? He is in our line of business, and lives in Budfield—unless I am mistaken.”

Martha’s hand fell so suddenly to the table that her rings brought out a sharp protestant tinkle from her tumbler.

“Mr. Crenshaw!” she broke in, abruptly. “Do you feel the draught from that window? The evenings are cool at this season after the sun goes down, yet the gas heats the rooms so soon that we find them oppressively warm if we exclude the air entirely.”

Mr. Crenshaw had not suspected a draught, and liked plenty of fresh air. He thanked the hostess for her kind solicitude for his comfort,—and——

* Fact.

"The Ideal Waitress"

"As I was saying, Risley and I met in Memphis last year and travelled East together. He is a jolly fellow—a capital travelling companion. I should like to meet him again."

"We know him well!" said John, heartily. "In fact, he is a near neighbor and a valued friend. His wife and mine were girls together, and are great cronies now."

"It goes without saying, then, that Mrs. Risley is a charming woman," rejoined the gallant Virginian, bowing smilingly to the head of the table, and marvelling somewhat that a compliment so obviously expedient should call up an impetuous wave of color to the recipient's forehead.

John cast a look of affectionate pride at her. The brilliant blush made her beautiful in his eyes.

"Thank you! You have guessed the truth. My friend Risley has drawn a prize in the matrimonial lottery. She is the best of neighbors and friends, a bright, original, sunny-tempered and sunny-faced little woman—worth her weight in gold. My dear! it is a pity we did not know that Mr. Crenshaw was acquainted with our good neighbors. We would have asked them to dinner this evening."

"Mr. Risley is not at home!" said Martha,

The Distractions of Martha

hastily, almost choking between laughter and confusion. "Mr. Blanton"—addressing the second guest—"we were speaking just now of the heat of gas. Somebody was talking to Mr. Purcell, the other day, of the superiority of acetylene to the common illuminating gas in this respect. It gives out very little heat, and a pure, white light said to be superior to electricity because more steady. Our electric light is, you know, a series of flashes, hence very trying to the eyes."

"The 'Somebody' was the very man we were discussing, my love," said easy-tempered John, indulgent of her unwonted flightiness. "Tom Risley has acetylene on the brain, and all statistics pertaining to it at his fingers' end—his tongue's end, I should say——"

A second accident to Martha's luckless glass of iced water! This time it went over entirely, but, being less than half-full, it was a thin stream that meandered weakly over her best damask cloth, to be intercepted by a napkin quickly applied by the accomplished waitress.

A new agony stabbed Martha. John would surely notice, and almost as surely recognize the face flushed as darkly as her own, bent low to the table between Mrs. Purcell and Mr. Crenshaw. She rushed to the rescue:

"'Great streams from little fountains flow!'"

“The Ideal Waitress”

she quoted, laughing unsteadily. “John! do you recollect that our best man upset a coffee-cup at our wedding-breakfast? It professed to hold a gill. The poor man declared afterward that a gallon flowed out of it. It was excruciatingly funny!”

To prove how excruciatingly in memory, she laughed hysterically.

“Well done! but that will do!” said a low voice in her ear as the maid leaned past her to refill her glass.

The familiar intonations, telling her that the masquerader’s senses held their own, sobered Martha on the instant. No harm was done as yet if Tom Risley could be kept off the table. She had thought acetylene so safe! and it led straight back to him. John liked their neighbor, and admired and quite loved Rosa with grateful affection, but he was also fond of a joke and never hesitated to rally Tom on his fads and fancies, affecting to consider him a visionary. Rosa would never forgive ridicule of her husband from another, and behind his back. The next sentence might rupture friendly relations between the families.

In desperation she began to ask questions about Richmond, Virginia, East and West, the South, Old and New, race-prejudices, Booker Wash-

The Distractions of Martha

ington—huddling query upon comment as fast as she could articulate until, smitten to the conscience by John's look of surprised incredulity, she brought up all standing, and silently anathematized recreant Rebecca in bitterness of spirit.

She had, however, succeeded in setting the ball in motion and at an angle that diverged so widely from Budfield that the Risleys were not again alluded to before she arose to leave the men to their cigars.

Bowing gracefully, as they arose to let her pass, she walked dignifiedly to the door, closed it after her and rushed along the passage to the kitchen.

Rosa had begun to wash the dishes at the sink, and heard nothing but the running water until her usually calm-mannered friend caught her about the waist and dropped her head upon her shoulder with a wailing laugh:

“Rosa! Rosa! how did I live through it!”

“Bless your soul! *I* didn't mind! Why should you?”

The sensible little body wiped the suds from her bared arms, waving off Martha with expressive gesticulation.

“Your lovely gown, my child! you will get it spattered! Now, that I am dry—what's the matter? Sit down in that rocking-chair, you poor

“*The Ideal Waitress*”

dear! and let us talk over the ‘pairty.’ Hans Breitmann’s couldn’t compare with it. I thought it went off be-yutifully! As to the talk about the Risleys—if I hadn’t seen that you, persecuted darling, were upon tacks and tenterhooks all the time, it would have been the best part of the show to me. I never had a chance before to know how people discuss me when I am supposed to be out of hearing. It was a terrible temptation to drop my best Irish curtsy to Mr. Purcell when he said I was worth my weight in gold. I tip the scale at one-forty! As to Tom’s fads, I could discourse eloquently upon the boredom I go through about acetylene, and airships, and other so-called *light* matters. Mr. Purcell will never know anything of the little comedy. So no harm is done.

“Whew! my face must look like a ripe tomato! This construction heats my brain to the core! Picturesque, but pesky! As I haven’t to go before the curtain, or on the stage again, I’ll take it off, by yer lave, mem!”

Suiting action to word, she pulled out pins and undid strings, and tossed Normandy cap and red wig upon a distant table. Her own dark curls were damp and matted with perspiration. She stood in the middle of the kitchen, running both hands through her hair to cool the scalp, arms

The Distractions of Martha

bare to the elbows, sleeves pinned to the shoulder, when a quick step rang upon the hall floor and John Purcell appeared in the doorway:

“Patty, dear! where shall I find——”

The sentence was never finished.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMMUTER

Old Noah, in primeval times,
With ark-bred thirst corroded,
Commuted first to drier climes,
And then straightway got "loaded."
That same load Noah sought to trundle
Was the first known commuter's bundle.

Since when, commuters daily bring
Parcels for farm and kitchen—
Hoes, beds, lawn-mowers—everything
Commuter-folk are rich in.
Ah! how the neighbors all look down
On him who bears back naught from town!

A. P. TERHUNE, *Commuter Ballads*.

A RAUCOUS voice read the doggerel aloud with a sing-song drawl in John Purcell's ear, the reader occupying the seat behind our hero.

John winced, and his hand moved involuntarily in the direction of a pyramidal pile of parcels upon the seat beside him.

Dick Dodd, the man with the raucous voice, chanced to be especially obnoxious to him at all times and in every place. He was a chronic grumbler. John spoke of him usually to his wife as a "sore head," and avoided his proximity

The Distractions of Martha

when he could, especially on the homeward evening trip from town.

To stand for twenty minutes in a trolley car, holding with one hand to a roof-strap, the other clutching the invariable bundle; interlocked from the knees downward with other lower limbs and, as often as not, packed to the shoulders as in a kit of dried herrings, along with other helpless specimens of "human various";—to race down a gang-plank if the tide be out, and up, if it be in, just in time to board a ferry-boat; while there, to choose between standing-room in a stifling cabin, reeking with the exhaled breaths of the thousands who have occupied it, successively, all day long, and taking one's chance of pneumonia outside, where river-fogs dispute preference with the penetrating effluvia wafted from the alleys allotted to teams and trucks;—when the opposite pier is gained, to charge up or down another gang-plank as madly as before, in the breathless run for the train where one never gets the seat he would like, or the society he would prefer, and the cars are hot and dusty in summer, heated to excess and stuffy to suffocation in winter;—when, having been shot off like a bomb at one's proper station-platform, one has a ten-minute tramp through torrid, or humid, or freezing darkness before the "light in the window for him"

The Commuter

greet his eyes;—John Purcell had not wintered and summered for fifteen months in Budfield, N. J., without knowing these and numberless other drawbacks to the comfort of a suburban residence.

He was often hungry to faintness when he got home. Sometimes he was “clean played out.” Sometimes he was cross. This evening he was all three. Business had gone crooked in a series of jolts and hitches and balks that taxed all his powers of endurance. He had eaten a sawdusty sandwich and gulped down a cup of villainous Rio coffee at noon, without leaving his desk. Martha had charged him not to forget to bring out a pound of English walnuts, and half-a-dozen oranges that night. She could not get either from her grocer—that is, none of decent quality, and those she could get were sold at iniquitous prices. After the manner of the notable feminine suburbanite, she had also planned to economize money and time by having a box of “chiffons” —light in weight but bulky in dimension, sent from Le Boutillier Brothers to Mr. Purcell’s office. John would save a day for her by bringing it out.

“I would not have done it, Jack, dear,” she had added, as he made no immediate reply—“if I were not waiting for the things. All first-class

The Distractions of Martha

houses send free of express charges. But I am really in need of ruchings, collars and ribbons."

She was a prudent wife who studied his interests in every particular, and this he knew as well after he saw the box from Le Boutillier's as when he had flavored the assertion with his morning "good-bye" kiss. How could he foresee that the ridiculously light box would measure twenty inches in one direction, and twelve in another, and be six inches deep? Or that a pair of shoes he had bought yesterday—ordering them to be sent to the office, of course—would be packed in a box absurdly out of proportion to his very neat foot? By rare good fortune he secured a whole seat for himself and arranged his parcels upon the vacant place beside him.

"Your neighbors can't look down upon *you!*" went on the man with the sore head. "Or upon any of us poor devils of commuters, for that matter. One and all, we are beasts of burden. Our minister read something in church last Sunday about one of Jacob's dozen sons—I forget his name—who was a 'strong ass, crouching down between two burdens.' I gave my wife a dig in the ribs and whispered—'That's the commuter, every time!' I've commuted now for fifteen years, and there's nothing smaller than a piano or a flour-barrel that I haven't lugged out

The Commuter

on this infernal old train at one time or another. You've got into the stride devilish quick. I've seen it growing upon you."

"If I don't complain I don't see that it is anybody else's business!" retorted John, nettled unconscionably by the laugh that made the words yet more offensive.

"My dear fellow! we are all companions in misery—victims of the commuter-craze. We *would* live in the country, yet make our living in town, and we must take the consequences. Have you read the 'Commuter Ballads' now coming out in *The Evening Planet*?"

"I don't care for trashy rhymes," said John shortly.

"No? But this fellow has been *there*—sure! He knows every pinch of the shoe. I cut out one last week and carry it with me to show to fellow-sufferers. By George! you should have seen Ned Bliss squirm when he read it! To my certain knowledge he has done escort duty and paid the fare for six cooks a month on an average for the past three years."

He had fished a bit of soiled and creased newspaper from his waistcoat pocket, and poked it over John's shoulder, under his very eyes.

"Thank you! I never read on the train after sundown."

The Distractions of Martha

John looked straight ahead and spoke morosely, with difficulty resisting the disposition to strike down the thick thumb and finger within four inches of his nose, noting, in spite of himself, that the nails were bitten short, and yet edged with black.

“No?” again. “Then, listen!

Should you question a commuter as to the one dark spot—

The fly within the ointment—the flaw in his bright lot—

(That’s ironical, you know,” interpolated the tormentor. “*We* know there are more flies than ointment in our pot—and it’s *all* flaw!”)

He won’t say “Loneliness,” nor “Mud,” nor “Trains,”
when brought to book;

Instead he’ll murmur: “Oh, just this—we cannot
keep a cook!

We bring one from the city on the seven forty-five,
And envious neighbors glare in wrath, beholding her
arrive.

But soon those self-same neighbors’ eyes are lit with
triumph mean

As they behold her leaving on the town-bound eight-
fifteen.

“That’s truth—every word of it——”

“It’s certainly not poetry!” snapped the baited
auditor. “You needn’t go on!”

The Commuter

He was evidently in such surly earnest that the man with the sore head and raucous voice subsided into his corner with what might be interpreted as a growl, or as a giggle, and let him alone.

Ten minutes thereafter the conductor's two-syllabled howl, translated by the initiated into "Budfield," brought fifty weary men to their feet. There was a general shuffle and clutching and adjustment of bundles upon convenient portions of the carriers' corporeal frames, and a rush for the outer darkness made visible by two jaded lamps over the station-door.

As John Purcell gained the platform somebody (in a subsequent and more charitable mood he tried to believe that it was *not* Dick Dodd!) jostled him so roughly that the paper bag of oranges flew in one direction, the bundle of English walnuts in another. The wrappings of both broke and the blended rattle and thud of the contents drew the attention of the dispersing crowd. It was not in the human nature of even a tired commuter to restrain a laugh, but two or three—to the honor of this, our common nature, be it written—stopped to help pick up pattering nuts and rolling fruit.

Foremost among these was Tom Risley. In the worthier mood to which I have alluded, John

The Distractions of Martha

had the grace to be ashamed that his first thought, as Tom came up to him with both hands full, was of the story he would take home, and how he and Rosa would laugh over it.

“Here are your victuals and drink, old man!” said Tom, blithely. “It’s lucky the drink is in the raw material. I dropped a bottle of champagne right on the track once. It went off like a pistol. Some of the lady-passengers screamed that the boiler had burst. There was pop and fizz at home I can tell you when my wife heard of it!”

“Thank you! I’m obliged to you! You are very kind!” John was saying, in order, to the collectors of the scattered groceries. “I am ashamed of my awkwardness!”

“It is the fate of commuter warfare!” answered one,—and another, as he walked away, began to sing to an air from “The Pirates of Penzance”:

A commuter’s life is not a happy one !

“I begin to believe that!” grumbled John, as, with one pocket of his overcoat bulging with oranges and the nuts rattling in another, he took up his boxes and walked up Hackmetack Avenue. “A fellow loses self-respect under this sort of drudgery. I, for one, am dead sick of it. To

The Commuter

say nothing of being boxed up in a filthy car and filthier boat for two hours every day,—with Tom, Dick, and Harry!”

“Especially Dick!” laughed Tom. John had once likened him and his wife to bottled sunshine. “He *is* depressing taken upon an empty stomach, after a hard day’s work! But there are compensations in the commuter’s life. To begin with, the majority of us cannot afford to live in town unless we go out above Harlem, and then we gain precious little in time and comfortable transportation. Look at the ‘L,’ in rush hours, morning and evening. And if suburbanizing is a little rough for three months of the year, we make up for it in nine months of pure air, roomy houses, fresh vegetables, and all the rest of it—don’t you know?”

“Six of one, and half-a-dozen of the other,” was the utmost concession John would make.

To add to his discomfort, the low clouds which had been gathering their forces since noon, began to spit fine hail before they got to the corner where their ways parted.

“A snow-storm coming!” he prophesied, gloomily. “Another block of trains to-morrow—and there’ll be the mischief to pay at the office. That’s one scored for the ‘L.’ Drifts don’t interfere with it. Good-night!”

The Distractions of Martha

Tom went off, whistling a quickstep, his feet tapping time to it in nearing his house.

John said something between his teeth when he set both boxes down on the veranda floor to leave a hand free for his latch key.

The door was opened from within before he could turn the key, and so abruptly as to jerk it out of the lock, and toss it upon the floor.

“Confound the key!” ejaculated the irate householder, scraping mat and boards with seeking fingers. “I wish you would be more careful!”

The “you” was, naturally, his wife, whose ears had been strained for the click in the lock for fifteen minutes past. She had begun to conjure up harrowing reasons for the delay and, like some of the rest of us, was ready in the reaction from needless anxiety to find fault with the cause of her needless folly.

“Why, John, how could *I* help your dropping your key? If you will come in and get ready for dinner I will bring a candle out here and find it for you. O! you *did* bring my box, didn’t you?” the hall-light showing the outline of the oblong burden on the floor.

The utter change of tone from discontent to gladness irked the modern Issachar unaccount-

The Commuter

ably. Still groping vainly, he shoved the box in her direction with a contemptuous foot.

“There! take your duds! An infernal nuisance they have been, too! I’ll come in when I find that d——d key, and not one second sooner, if it takes an hour.”

Martha’s behavior was that of any just-minded wife. She lifted the box tenderly, and carried it up to her room, holding her head high and biting her under-lip hard. Without undoing the enveloping paper, she thrust the insulted parcel into a closet and tripped down the back stairs as John, having found the key by treading upon it in the dark, ascended the front.

She was in her chair at the table when he entered the dining-room, and when he stooped to kiss her—rather perfunctorily, it must be said, his ill-humor having but partially evaporated—she glanced at the clock on the opposite wall. Not pointedly, still less with malicious meaning, but as if she could not help it.

John answered as if she had spoken, and had said much.

“Yes! I know it is late according to your notion—and your cook’s! The train was twenty minutes behind time. A broken axle on a freight ahead of us, just outside of Jersey City—or something of that kind.”

The Distractions of Martha

Sinking into his chair, he interpolated his speech with a brief form of grace before meat,—resuming the more important subject where he had left off, when the maid had set soup before him and left the room:

“Punctuality is a virtue, my dear. Nobody appreciates that fact more than I do, and nobody practices it more faithfully than I when I can be punctual without making everybody about me uncomfortable. But a virtue overdone comes very near being a vice. As, for instance, when a man comes home, fagged to death by business, faint, because he hasn’t had a spare minute for luncheon, fretted, because he has been called a ‘beast of burden’ on the train, and been made a laughing-stock of the loafers at the station because the cursèd bundles broke and covered the platform with groceries—and his wife meets him as stiffly as if he had robbed a bank, or eloped with another woman!”

With true feminine regard for appearances, Martha glanced warningly toward the maid who was passing a glass dish of powdered Parmesan to her mistress. The glance was hardly more than a ray from the corner of the left eye, the flick of an eyelash, but John saw and understood.

He dovetailed a sentence into the harangue in the same tone with the rest:

The Commuter

“And is muzzled like a cross dog if he ventures upon an explanation.”

Martha stirred the Parmesan into the plate before her; her voice rang as clear and as cold as the ice against the side of the tumbler the waitress was filling with water:

“This macaroni soup is just the thing for a cold night. We are on the eve of another snow-storm, I am afraid.”

John had not tasted the soup, but the savory steam titillating his nostrils should have held him back from the most disgraceful—(I had written “unmanly,” but erased it for reasons some women readers will comprehend)—the most disgraceful act I shall ever have the displeasure of recording as his.

He looked directly at his wife and said, lip curled and eyes narrowed in a sneer:

“That remark is a sop to Cerberus, I suppose! A propitiatory offering to the virtual controller of the establishment. I must trouble myself to apologize to more than one offended deity for the crime of being twenty minutes late!”

His wife might not have seen the sneer, or heard the taunt, so serene was her slight smile, so gentle her voice:

“I hope you will like the soup! I took a fancy this afternoon to make it. A fancy that has ma-

The Distractions of Martha

terialized pretty successfully—or so I flatter myself. It is pleasant to feel that one's hand has not quite lost its cunning. Which reminds me of a funny story Rosa Risley was telling me to-day. She heard a country preacher last summer *mis*-read that psalm after this fashion: 'May my tongue forget her cunning, and my right hand cleave to the roof of my mouth!' And he did not discover his blunder, although the congregation smiled, and some of them almost giggled!"

She laughed a little, in her most ladylike way, in addressing herself anew to her soup.

John tasted his, then was deliberately guilty of the meanness of re-salting and peppering it.

"It is my opinion"—he observed while shaking the pepper-cruet—"that your friend is a past-mistress in the art of word-embroidery. She never lets a story suffer for the lack of a telling touch."

"No?" said Martha, as blandly as before, and John became fully aware of the fact that, having discovered his savage mood (a genuine com-muterish savagery), she was resolute not to suffer herself to be drawn into a quarrel. As a lord of creation, and an independent suburbanite, he resented the resolution. He recalled, if she did not, another of Rosa's embroidered anecdotes:

The Commuter

A canny Scot counselled his son "to obey the Scriptures when talking with a scolding woman, and aye return her the saft answer. It's Bible law, me lad, and moreover it will mak' her a deal madder!"

Given a cross commuter, with a headache, a raw night, the consciousness of putting himself deeper into the wrong with every intemperate word, and an icily-imperturbable wife—and you have the elements of as pretty a domestic tiff as imagination can conjure up, so far as one person can handle a quarrel.

Had the soup been less savory, even after adding the condiments it did not need; had the warmed air of the well-appointed dining-room, fragrant with the breath of the cluster of Bon Silène roses, set nearer his plate than his wife's, —been less grateful, and the rest of the meal less to the liking of a famished man—our hero's better self would have conquered the evil spirit invoked by influences detailed earlier in this chapter. Into each commuter's life some wrangles must fall while flesh is flesh and blood is blood. Which, being interpreted, means while men are men and women are women.

By the time a cup of excellent coffee was sent on its errand of digestive mercy to soup, roast, vegetables, salad and sweets, Richard was him-

The Distractions of Martha

self again, within and without, reasonably content with home, wife and his renovated self. Martha left him in the library to the enjoyment of his cigar and the evening paper he "had not had a chance to glance at," when she excused herself "to give orders for breakfast."

Instead of going directly to the kitchen, she stole away to her own room, unlighted save by the street-lamps, a glow broken into wavering lines by the now fast-falling snow.

She, too, had had a tiresome day. Ellen Dolan, the present incumbent of the office of general housework service, had "asked out" for an hour in the early afternoon:

"Just to step down the street long enough to buy the makin's of a calico dress I can run up meself in the evenings. A livin' out gurrel has no business puttin' out sewin'. I've put the mate into the pan all ready to shlip into the oven, and the vegetables is cleaned and paled, an' every-thing else is forehanded. I'll be back before three o'clock."

As she was fully accoutred for the outing, the "asking out" was an empty form, and Mrs. Purcell's consent a foregone conclusion. When she presented herself in the kitchen, laden with parcels, at half-past five o'clock, out of breath with the run up-hill and bubbling over with angry

The Commuter

denunciations of country storekeepers who "kept people waitin' forever before they waited on them, and had nothin' worth buyin' at all, at all, after a pairson had stood about till she was fair sick at hait"—she found that Mrs. Purcell had put the meat down to roast, made the soup and set it at the side of the range to simmer into richness.

The laggard was received gravely and her excuses accepted with the briefest phrase of regret, but there was no reprimand. That there could be none was patent. The girl was capable, neat, quick, willing, industrious, and, in the main, too satisfactory for her employer to risk losing her upon a trifling provocation. The extra afternoon was a liberty; overstaying her time and leaving the mistress to do her work was an offence. Martha preferred to condone both rather than have a certain scene and a probable rupture. "Change," deprecated by all housewives, is a haunting terror to the suburbanite,—in winter a horror to be averted by every possible means.

"In town, you have to wink at servants' peccadilloes with one eye; in the country, with both, and stop both ears as well"—was one of Rosa's sagest proverbs.

Martha congratulated herself that she had

The Distractions of Martha

recollected and acted upon it when, for the third time in ten days, John's train was late. Ellen had a trick of oversleeping herself in the morning, being young and healthy. Mrs. Purcell had, long ago, taken upon herself the responsibility of seeing that she was awakened in season to get the commuterial early breakfast ready. Luncheon was often delayed from twenty to thirty minutes, that Ellen's sweeping or ironing might not be interrupted. Dinner was invariably on time, to the fraction of a minute, so far as her share in the duty went. Everything was cooked, dished, and set over hot water to keep warm, plates were warmed, gas lighted, and herself in irreproachable waitress-costume, the black very black, the white shining like frozen snow—on the tiptoe of expectancy for the coming of the master of the house.

To-night she had added to expectancy fussiness that approximated ill-humor as the minutes flew, and there was no sign of the coming man. Twice she looked into the parlor where Mrs. Purcell sat reading, to say—

“He ain't home yet? Kinder quare, his bein' so late, ain't it?”

Both times Mrs. Purcell had replied, without raising her eyes from her book:

“Something has detained the train.”

The Commuter

“I ought to have told her that she was impertinent,” reflected Martha, now, standing miserably by the window, staring into the snowy night. “I ought to have reproved her this afternoon for staying out so late, and leaving me to do her work. It was weak and foolish in me to be more annoyed by John’s want of punctuality because it made her cross, than on my own account. And his irritability to-night would not have cut me to the quick (poor, tired old man!) if he had not touched upon the truth that I am *afraid* of my servant! I am running my house to suit her! conforming tastes and habits to the will of a vulgar, illiterate peasant-girl. Yes! John is right! I am a weak coward! a bond-slave! If he knew this as well as I do he would despise me!”

The soliloquy broke off suddenly. A man was loitering up and down the side street separated from the Purcell’s lawn by a low hedge, over which he paused to look at each passing. His derby hat was pulled low over his ears to meet the upturned collar of a rough ulster,—he slouched in his walk, now and then halting, as if unsteady upon his feet. Altogether, he was a suspicious-looking straggler, decided the prudent watcher, to be lounging about any respectable neighborhood on a stormy night. She must

The Distractions of Martha

speak of the circumstance to John, and caution Ellen to be very careful in fastening down the kitchen-windows.

He stopped upon his beat at the wire gate set in the hedge, opened it and stole up the path leading to the side-door, his footsteps muffled by the snow. Martha raised her window noiselessly and leaned out, prepared to challenge him should he try the hall-door.

A window in the kitchen went up at the same instant, and Ellen bent far over the sill.

“Like a faithful watch-dog!” thought the mistress, with a thrill of penitent gratitude.

“Hist, Davey! Is it yourself?” was the sharp whisper that undeceived her.

The fellow left the path to get to her:

“Yes! it’s me! And a h——l of a time ye’ve kept me waitin’ out in the snow! a-watchin’ of yer d——d winder blinds to be shet to let me know I could come in! I was just makin’ up me mind to lave for good an’ all.”

Another oath.

“Arrah! now, darlin’!” in a wheedling whine. “It’s none o’ me fault at all, at all! It’s just *Her* maneness in not comin’ to give her orders for breakfast until goin’ on for nine o’clock. *He* was late agin to-night, and that put me dinner back—as usual! I’m fair broken-haired wid the

The Commuter

dirty tricks av' em both—bad 'cess to them, the low-lived beggars!”

The bath-room was directly above the kitchen, and adjoined Mrs. Purcell's chamber. The lovers' colloquy was still in progress as a third window slid up, working silently in its grooves, and a big pitcher of ice-cold water was emptied full into Davey's upturned face.

His howl and Ellen's stifled scream drowned the sound of the closing window and the patter of swift feet down the stairs.

John, absorbed in his paper, and lazily luxurious in the enjoyment of fire and cigar, did not notice his wife's hurried entrance and irregular breathing. She was as apparently lost to the outer world in her book, five minutes later, when Ellen, to whose progress from room to room overhead Mrs. Purcell had listened with inward glee, put a red face in through the opening door:

“Did yez not hear a n'ise in here?”

The mistress of herself, her home and the situation, turned in grave rebuke upon the intruder:

“Ellen! you forgot to knock before coming in! Please shut that door! Now! what have you to say?”

The girl's hair was dripping wet—Mrs. Purcell noted with satisfaction. She trembled like a leaf with rage and fright.

The Distractions of Martha

“I’ve had a turrrible scare!” she burst out, wringing her hands. “I was shuttin’ the blinds of the kitchen-winder as *quite* and paceable as possible, when down come a pailful of wather from the ruff—or it might be the bath-room winder—and wet me to the skin, and then I heerd a norful n’ise in the yard——”

John’s bewilderment was sincere beyond the shadow of a doubt. He looked over the top of his paper at the distracted speaker—then at his wife:

“What is she talking about? Have you the least idea?”

“There is nobody in the house but ourselves, Ellen,—*or ought not to be!*” said Mrs. Purcell, with significant severity. “I heard a yell awhile ago, but supposed it was some drunken loafer outside. You *are* wet!” regarding her attentively. “Have you been out in the snow? Was it you I heard go upstairs just now?”

“Indade, an’ it was, mem!” impressed, through her excitement, by the lady’s tone of dignified inquiry. “I ran up to see who had throwed the wather.”

“And you found nobody?”

“Niver a livin’ soul—barring meself!”

“So I supposed!” smiling slightly and sarcastically. “This is a very strange story, Ellen, but one that does not interest Mr. Purcell or my-

The Commuter

self. Go back to the kitchen and try to compose yourself. I shall look in before bed-time and give orders for breakfast. Shut the door after you."

John looked across the table at the calm, inscrutable face bent over the "Life of Dorothea Dix"—parted his lips as if to ask a question, then changed his mind and transferred his thoughtful regards to the fire. The wind whistled piercingly outside; the shriek of the locomotive, tearing its way into the heart of the country, dulled by the snow-curtain, enhanced the sense of home comfort engendered by fragrant warmth, the book-lined room, the dancing flames and the refined presence of her whom he loved better than the whole world beside.

"It is worth while to be a commuter when one gets a Home in exchange!" he mused aloud, by and by.

"I am glad you think so!" responded his wife, quietly. "There are two sides to every shield."

Mystified Ellen, listening at the door, heard these two sentences and nothing more, although she knelt, her ear glued to the keyhole, for five minutes longer. Her mistress may have guessed that she was there. Perhaps—for the never-indiscreet Martha was laying in other stores of prudence with the gain in experience—she was

The Distractions of Martha

biding her time for taking her husband into confidence.

Certain it is that she spoke to no one of the interrupted *tête-à-tête* under the bath-room window, until Ellen's month was fully up, the maid's wages were paid, and she was told that her services were no longer needed.

"I think it best to make a change," was all the satisfaction she got from the calm-faced employer, when she demanded "What had gone wrong?"

"I will write a recommendation for you," concluded the lady. "And you can refer any one to me who wishes to ask questions."

The Risleys dropped in that evening after John had dined himself out of his commuter humor, and was full of praises of his wife's management:

"Her new woman doesn't come until day after to-morrow," he explained. "She always contrives to have an interregnum between two tyrants. It gives her time to breathe and to get the premises clear of traces of the last incumbent before the next comer. There's some mystery connected with the flitting of this one. Patty tells me that she gave Ellen warning a week ago, but she never lisped a word to me about it until to-night, when she remarked that she must be her own waitress. The dinner would have given

The Commuter

her away anyhow. No hired cook has her touch."

Martha's face was radiantly roguish as she patted his shoulder gratefully:

"Now—' friends fit but few '—I have a story to tell!"

A narrative over which her select audience laughed themselves sick, and which, as it embodies the only prank of which the staid matron was ever known to be guilty, I could not refrain from setting down here, as one of the humors of a Commuter's Life.

CHAPTER XV

JACK TAKES THE MATTER IN HAND

Be bolde! be bolde! and everywhere be bolde!
SPENSER, *The Faerie Queene*.

“As YOU know, Jack, dear, I seldom worry you with domestic matters. But, if you don't mind, I should like to submit a correspondence to you before mailing my part of it.”

Like a tactful matron who had profited by the experiences of four years of wedded life and practical housewifery, Mrs. Purcell did not prefer her request until her husband had eaten his dinner and sat himself down in the library, slippers feet stretched out before his favorite open wood-fire, the postprandial cigar between his lips—the very picture of a prosperous householder with satisfied domestic tastes. His wife, fuller of figure than when we first saw her, and much the comelier for it, attired, as usual, with exquisite neatness and in good taste, had just come from the nursery. Her habit was to run up for a minute after dinner, while John was lighting his

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

cigar, to make sure that all was well with Jack, Junior, now two years old. That she had never, in twenty-four months, failed to find him sleeping soundly, with no intention in his pulpy brain of doing anything but sleep for six hours to come, did not excuse, to her, the omission of a single visit of inspection. System was still the tutelary genius of her works and ways.

John put out a lazy arm to draw her close to him, and inclined his head toward the caressing hand it was sure to meet.

“I know I have the most considerate, the cleverest, the best and dearest wife ever made, or who will ever be created. Mother Nature broke the pattern after she turned you out. Sit down here!” bringing his knees together to offer a comfortable seat. “I won’t blow the smoke in your face.”

“I don’t mind a really good cigar,” returned Martha, good-humoredly. “And you are too much of a gentleman to smoke anything else. May I read two letters to you?”

“Fire away!” said John, turning his face aside to puff an artistic ring into right-angled space.

Martha was gravely businesslike.

“I had this today from a Mrs. Bellows, No. — West One Hundredth Street, New York:

The Distractions of Martha

"MRS. PURCELL:

"DEAR MADAM:—A woman by the name of Emma Smith has applied to me for the place of cook in my family. She says she lived for over two years with you, and that she has permission to refer to you for testimonials of ability and character. When I asked why she had no written certificate, she answered that she left you when too ill to work, expecting to return. She was out of health so long that you could not wait for her. She put off asking for a recommendation from time to time until she was ashamed to go back, etc. Kindly let me know if this story is true. Also, whether or not the girl is a good cook, neat, honest, sober, willing, good-tempered and industrious—in short, while in your employ did she give entire satisfaction in every respect?

"By answering these questions frankly *and confidentially* you will greatly oblige

"Yours respectfully,

"ANNA MARR BELLOWES.

"Address Mrs. Robert Bellows,

"No. — West One Hundredth Street, City."

John blew a deliberate full-orbed ring into vacancy before saying, in the non-committal accent peculiar to the husbandly judiciary, and which invariably puts wives upon the deprecatory defensive—" *Well!* "

As meekly as a child, Martha opened and read the second letter :

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

“MRS. BELLOWS:

“DEAR MADAM:—Emma Smith was in my employ for two years as general house-servant. For eighteen months she gave entire satisfaction. She is an excellent cook, apt, and willing to learn; a good laundress, a fair waitress and chamber-maid. During the time I have named she was pleasant in manner, respectful, neat and industrious. Then (probably because of unfortunate associations) she became careless, untidy and uncertain in work and temper, staying out at night now and then, and giving weak excuses for her conduct. I suspected that she had taken to drinking, but although I often detected the odor of liquor in her breath, I cannot say that I ever saw her absolutely intoxicated. A month ago she absented herself without leave for two nights and two days, appearing on the third day with a story of sickness in her brother’s family, and the necessity of immediate return to the sick-room. I was myself confined to my bed with sick headache, and my baby was far from well. I offered to pay for a trained nurse for her brother’s child if Emma would stay until I could secure some one in her place. She insisted upon going at once, although her month was but half gone.

“Since she left me, I have been told by my tradespeople that she has been drinking heavily for nearly a year. I cannot vouch for the truth of this story, but I can give you the names of my grocer and baker, who make these statements, and are willing to confirm them.

“I have written at length, because I think it but right to put you in possession of all the facts in the case. I am

The Distractions of Martha

treating you as I should wish to be treated were our positions reversed.

“Sincerely yours,

“MARTHA BURR PURCELL.”

John filliped the ash from his cigar with the nail of his little finger. A man can throw a vast deal of expression into this simple action. John made it very significant. Before putting the cigar back into his mouth he feigned to examine the lighted end with profound concern. Martha's color rose and her heart began to go down. An immense majority of wives are in wholesome (or unwholesome) dread of their lords when these last are in judicial mood. John Purcell was a capital fellow, and a model husband, but he was a mortal man. Such construe a request for advice into an opportunity for argument.

“It beats all,” he said slowly, and of course magisterially, “how you women sugar-coat pills and beat about the bush! The girl is a *sot!* You know it, and I know it! After she went away you found a dozen empty whiskey-bottles in her room-closet, and her mattress half burned in two from beneath, where she had dropped a match among some papers on the floor. Your butcher and baker and candlestick-maker are

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

ready to swear that she was drunk and abusive to them, times without number. Rosa Risley's servant says Emma had carousals here, night after night, while we were in the country last summer. In the face of all this you write a four-page letter full of rose-water sentiment that will put the creature into another house, where she may quite succeed in burning the family in their beds. The very thing I've heard you condemn in other mistresses hundreds of times. You've written a very pretty, ladylike letter, my dear, but you haven't done as you would be done by. That is—according to my way of thinking!"

Martha was an even-tempered woman, but she cast her eyes down to hide a light in them that was not Griselda-ish; her lips were compressed. She had taken great pains in writing that letter, and in her secret soul thought it a neat production, candid, Christian and comprehensive. Husbands are adepts in throwing cold water upon wifely complacency. The dipperful cast by John into her face was dashed with acid that smarted where it struck.

"If you will write a letter, I will copy it!" she proposed, holding down tone and temper.

John smoked savagely for three seconds.

"Not a bit of it, my dear! It's your fight—not mine!"

The Distractions of Martha

Martha tightened the mental rein. If he had but known it, her voice was dangerously calm.

“But, John! I really want to do the right thing. Tell me just what you would say if this were your ‘fight,’ as you call it. Suppose one of your clerks referred to you in just such circumstances? What would you do?”

“The only fair and manly thing—tell the truth to my brother-man! Without fear or favor. But women’s ideas of honor differ from men’s in this, as in other things. Send your letter as it is. You know I never dictate to you in domestic affairs.”

“But, Jack, dear!” She had left her perch upon his knee, and stood on the hearth, turning the letter, folded for mailing, in her hands, the picture of distressful incertitude. “I *do* want to do the honorable thing according to my lights! You know I never saw the girl really drunk——”

John gave a short laugh, and repeated the ash-and-finger-nail act over the pretty ash-cup his wife had given him on his last birthday.

The tears started to Martha’s eyes—her voice thickened and shook.

“That is not quite fair or kind, John! I asked for advice, not ridicule. And”—turning away, that he might not see the drops which escaped the fast-winking lids—“it is not a bit like you!”

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

Of course, a reconciliation scene ensued. Fifteen minutes later, Martha had humbly asked and received gracious permission from her repentant spouse to tear up the letter she had written, and throw it into the fire, then seated herself gratefully at her desk to write from his dictation the epistle an honorable business man would indite to his brother-man in the like circumstances.

He made it short and strong :

“MRS. ROBERT BELLOWS:

“DEAR MADAM:—The maid, Emma Smith, of whom you write, left my employ in a drunken spree. I had suspected for some months that she was falling into bad habits, but had not positive proof of what my tradespeople assured me was the fact——”

The scribe looked up. “But, John! they never said a word to me of it until after she left.”

“Say ‘have assured me,’ since you are set upon splitting hairs. Are you ready?”

“She absented herself for two days and two nights without leave, and showed all the signs of her recent debauch when she presented herself in my sick-room with a story of a sick relative, which I learned afterward was a falsehood.

“She has told you the truth in one respect. She was unable to work when she left, but not because she was ill.

“You have asked me to deal frankly with you, and I

The Distractions of Martha

will add that after the woman left my house I found ten empty whiskey-bottles in her clothes-closet, and a pile of charred papers under her bed, the mattress of which was burned half through.

"In the circumstances I am surprised that she dared refer to me for a certificate of character.

"Respectfully yours,

"MARTHA BURR PURCELL."

"You don't think it advisable to answer her questions as to her qualifications, and so forth?" ventured Martha, pressing the blotter upon the written page.

"Why should you waste your time and hers by going into particulars that would not interest her in the least? What you have told her settles the matter for good and all."

Martha folded and enveloped the letter slowly. As she affixed the stamp she sighed.

"The girl was very unworthy, I suppose, but I can't forget how good she was to me when I was not feeling well, and she was certainly very fond of Baby. She cried over him as she said 'Good-by' that last day."

"Maudlin!" said John, but smiling indulgently.

He is an exceptionally unreasonable man who is not good-humored when he has carried his point.

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

“I’ll mail that before I go to bed, and *that* chapter of Martha’s Distractions will be closed!”

This was Saturday night. When he came home on Wednesday evening, a broad envelope, with a determined-looking, official-printed inscription in the upper left-hand corner, lay beside his plate. He repeated it aloud in slipping a fork-tine under the flap:

“Women’s Defensive League.”

The face the wife thought so handsome that she never tired of watching it, changed darkly as he read. An ugly word escaped the pursed lips. Ugly words were more rare than before he married a fastidious woman; rarer yet since Jack—as the mother had thought it well to remind his father—really understood what was said to him, and was beginning to imitate his paternal model.

“What is it, dear? Anything unpleasant?” asked Martha, in real alarm.

He tossed the letter across the table, narrowly missing her plate of soup.

“MR. JOHN C. PURCELL:

“DEAR SIR:—Emma Smith, lately employed by you, has entered a complaint at our office against you for non-payment of a fortnight’s wages due her when she left your employ—amount, \$10.00 (ten dollars). She has put her claim into our hands for collection. Will you call and

The Distractions of Martha

settle this debt, and spare yourself the expense of a legal process?

Respectfully yours,

“AGNES HALL, Secretary.”

“Legal process be—*shot!*” ejaculated the irate householder, recollecting Jack’s imitative powers in time to swallow a warmer expletive. “That’s as much as women know about law! The creature dismissed herself. You begged her to stay her month out, and she refused. Agnes Hall, Secretary’s claim hasn’t a leg to stand upon. That’s one law that protects the employer—thank Heaven! It got on the code by accident, of course, but it’s *there!* As I shall have the pleasure of reminding the Women’s Defensive League in person to-morrow morning. Yes! and give them page and section for it. We learned that much early in the action, little woman—thanks to Bridget the First.”

“The rule worked the other way then,” Martha could not help saying.

The memory was still a sore spot in her economic mind.

“We’ve got the whip-hand now!” exulted the husband. “I could almost forgive her for teaching us the lesson.”

He was in a yet more jubilant mood in reporting to her, the next evening, the result of what

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

he called his "bout" with Agnes Hall, Secretary.

"To make assurance trebly sure, I looked into Layton's office in our building," he related. "Capital fellow, Layton! long-headed and kind-hearted! We had had some business dealings before, and became quite well acquainted. He told me in ten words that I had law as well as right on my side. You should have seen Miss Agnes Hall, Secretary's face when I declined to discuss the matter with her, but referred her to my lawyer! She turned white at the sound of his name. It's a terror to evil-doers."

In a very different mood he sought the presence of his lawyerly friend one week thereafter. This time he had a letter to show, as at the former call. A formidable-looking document—long of envelope, confusing as to technical verbiage. He and his wife had made out the sense of the document over night. It sounded preposterous when they disentangled the pith from a network of bark and fibre. It was appalling, too.

A reputable law firm—at sight of whose letter-head Mr. Layton raised his eyebrows, and put out a meditative lower lip—notified John C. Purcell and Martha Burr Purcell, his wife, of Budfield, New Jersey, that they would be proceeded against for wilful and malicious slander of Emma

The Distractions of Martha

Smith, Plaintiff. Said slanderous and libellous allegations were contained in a letter written by the said Martha Burr Purcell to Anna Marr Bellows, of New York City, *et cetera, et cetera*.

The lawyer's eyebrows went up again as John laid Mrs. Bellows' letter before him, his finger upon "frankly *and confidentially*."

"That's a woman's sense of honor!" growled the defendant. "Yet they wonder that the Servant Question is breaking up homes by the thousand, and making us the laughing stock of the world as a nation of hotel-dwellers!"

He said the same in substance and at length to me last week *en route* from New York to Budfield, where I was to stand godmother for his baby daughter.

"Layton pulled me through all right. Splendid fellow that! and an *honest* lawyer! He gave the girl's counsel to understand that we could prove her to be no better than a common drunkard, and scared him with the bottles and the burnt bed. But his strongest point was the threat to show up the Bellows woman to the jury, and through the newspapers, in her true colors, as a traitor to her sister-housewife and false to her written word. She was properly frightened, I can tell you. Wrote a cringing letter to my wife,

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

saying the girl had insisted upon knowing why she wouldn't engage her, and by begging and scolding and crying, got the letter away from her to show to her sister, then wouldn't give it back. How's *that* for honor? And she isn't the only one that has served another housekeeper as mean a trick.

"If you would organize and treat one another fairly, the entire system of Domestic Service would be reformed inside of a year.

"There is a thorough, if informal, Trades' Union among your maids, of whatever nationality," he continued, deliberately. "It is as powerful as any Secret Society ever known to a Government. They hold together, and they pull straight in harness. You housewives have no class spirit—no loyalty to one another. A machinist's main object in constructing his wheels and cogs and levers and pulleys, and what not, is to avoid friction. Your household machinery is all friction except when a woman who is a perfect cook, competent chambermaid and an apt waitress, does her own housework, and puts out her washing. Then she goes to pieces physically, unless she is as strong as an ox, and has such a head for System as my wife has, for instance."

"Yet our foremothers used to do all that—

The Distractions of Martha

and more—and lived to a green old age”—I slipped in a word.

I had heard John on American housewifery before, and knew that discourse thereupon was a sweet and savory morsel under his tongue.

“That is the stock argument which flogs women of this generation out of breath—out of their senses—out of their lives! To say nothing of the primitive manner of our grandmother’s living, the well-to-do among them had ‘help.’ *That’s* what they called them, and they were right. They had a place in the household, and fitted into it. They were not Arabs, or rather, Ishmaelites—predatory bands, their hands against employers—not working with, and for them for the common good.”

“There are bright and shining exceptions!” I managed to get in another word. “Mrs. Risley’s Mary, now in her twelfth year of service, and Martha’s Rose and Susan, who have lived with her to the satisfaction of all concerned for four years.”

We had left the train, and were strolling through the sweet-scented twilight toward the Purcell home.

“A homestead,” Martha had called it to me after a wing had been added and the roof raised

Jack Takes the Matter in Hand

a half-story. "We own it now, you know. And we have lived here ten years."

John raised his cane to point at the stars, brightening above our heads.

"Exceptions!" he said, meaningly, "that make the rest of the sky look darker!"

THE END