

like to bring out, and left the words to come to me when I got up.

I noticed folks smile a good deal and they seemed mighty good natured over something, but why shouldn't they at the prospect of a good supper, though I didn't see why they need laugh so much when I was through, and I made up my mind I'd spoiled it all, till 'twas all over and the old maids swarmed round me and almost hugged me with delight, and said that my speech just made things go through, 'twasn't for anything clever I'd said I'm sure, and I'd forgotten what Mrs. Younghusband told me altogether.

But I'm going too fast, for my speech wasn't exactly the first thing after all.

'Twas decided to open with Old Hundred, and the audience joined, in right good earnest. Then the curtain rose on a *tableau vivant*, I think they called it, though it looked to me, like a row of old-fashioned girls on each side of me, for I was the central figure of the semi-circle, and wore the biggest cap and fullest apron of the lot. I wouldn't consent to anything artificial, for everyone most knew Kate Benjamin just as she was. The rest powdered their hair, except 'twas golden, and combed it down plain, and some wore dainty little side-curls, several were gravely knitting or sitting with folded hands, looking as demure as grandmothers. One was feeding a cat, on her lap; another rubbing her glasses and peering over them at a book lying upon her knees, and at each end of the semi-circle a tiny table held a teapot and cups, and two or three old maids were drinking tea together.

I waited a minute or two for folks to get over their surprise a little, and then stepped forward and began. (A short-hand reporter was there somewhere and this is about the way it read in the papers.)

"Ladies and Gentlemen; We're just a lot of old maids. We're not Lords of Creation nor Ladies of Fashion—we're not anxious to be famous nor beautiful—and I suppose we're not of much account anyway, unless it comes to scrubbin' and bakin' and cookin'; and sweeping and mending and sewin'; running round givin' out tracts, gettin' petitions signed, and collectin' for missionaries and poor folks; or knittin', feedin' cats and drinkin' tea. We're not Woman's Rights Advocates, nor men-haters—some of us can prove that,—(and I looked round at the powdered heads.) You'll soon prove it to your heart's content, for you'll get a good supper. We don't need to stand up for rights—(perhaps we might if we were married.) It's man's business to do the fighting, and we're willing to let him do it; we won't trespass on his rights. Sometimes we get our rights best by saying nothing about them.

"But perhaps you'd like to know why we choose to be old maids. The title's not fashionable, but we don't object to that. We've good reasons—very good reasons (laughter). Not that nobody asked us to marry, perhaps they didn't get the chance. And then, you know, we have sometimes seen our friends marry and lose happiness as well as freedom. Would they despise the title of old maid if it were possible to get free again? You see we're free-will agents—free to choose or reject whom we please. (Here I saw a sweet face droop beneath her cap and powdered puffs, and I knew why. Her parents want her to marry a man that's not quite temperate, and she's not a free-will agent in the matter.) Yes! we're free to act for ourselves, and therefore have our rights already. What more can we want? What more can earth give us?"

"Young men, let me advise you! You have the power of choice in your own hands. Take an old maid's advice and don't choose a wife merely for her pretty face or charming manner; no, nor for her power to flirt. How many of you, I wonder, take the trouble to drop 'small talk' long enough to become acquainted with the principles of your lady friends? Perhaps you don't give her credit for being serious enough to possess any. Just test her on the temperance question before you stake your future, and make sure that you will not be in danger of having your tastes depraved by being fed on wine-jellies, brandied peaches, and sauces, whiskey flavored soups, home-made wines, nor any other of the temptin' recipes poured in upon the cooks, from the lower regions." Here the laughter quite interrupted me till I kind o' caught the joke; then I said, "If any cooks of that species are here I hope they won't go out before I've time to apologise. Of course everybody knows I meant the receipts originated below; if the cooks once got there they'd have to stay. They're the innocent dupes of friends who whisper their suggestions of temptin' flavors. Would the angels inspire them to put such traps in the way of the unsuspecting? Certainly not! They don't come from Heaven; then where do they originate? I leave you to settle that point.

"Now as old maids have perfect freedom of speech—I'm afraid most of our married sisters have lost their's—I'd like to say a word to my own sex. First of all—keep your freedom! (There was an audible smile.) Your freedom of conscience, I mean. You need never lose that. Yes, and your freedom of speech, too. Not in order to use your tongue too freely after marriage, but to be able to say, 'No,' decidedly to every one that asks you, if your conscience cannot approve of him, in every respect. Don't be afraid of being called an old maid, rather dread being an unloved wife, or worse still, an unloving one. We set you the example. We show you that we're not afraid to come out boldly and say we're for freedom;—not freedom to flirt, nor to scorn the honest affection of an innocent, well-meaning young man, but freedom to speak against fashionable sins—such as get winked at, and glossed over, but lead downward after all. It may make you unpopular, but I'd rather be unpopular now than at the day of judgment, wouldn't you now? Those who scorn your advice will at heart respect you the more for your honest principles, and if they shun you, it's because oil and water won't mix.

"Now I suppose I've used my freedom of speech long enough to prove that I haven't lost it. I never made a speech in public before, and I find the part I forgot to study is how to bring it to a close."

I paused to think how I was goin' to end, but they all began to laugh and didn't seem to be goin' to stop, so I took a step or two back and began to bow, and the curtain dropped and shut off the audience, so I went back to my big arm chair, and they told me I was through, and that we must get off the platform before the curtain rose again.

The next that appeared on the stage was about a half-dozen Scotch lassies with old-fashioned musical instruments, and dressed as they supposed ancient dames attired themselves in Auld Scotia. They sang a song they called "Auld Scotch Songs," that "brought the house down," so to speak, and I, that am so fond of Scotch music, though without a drop of Scotch blood in my veins so far's I know, was just delighted with the "twirl o' their tongues" as an old Highland lady put it. It seemed so much easier to find old Scotch songs than any other that 'twas hard to prevent them choosin' all from the same nation, so we decided, as we were all pretty much British, we'd have English and Irish songs as well. Then some wanted to personate Mary, Queen o' Scots, and Queen Victoria, in ancient costumes, but neither o' them were old maids, and we weren't givin' a theatre either. We favored Queen Elizabeth, however, in a tableau towards the end, and one of the maids read a Literary Production of that period, and 'twas liked very much; so was the harp behind the screen, supposed to be playing before the Queen. We had Ellen Douglas, too, before 'twas over. Of course we had no out-door scenery, but we had old Allan-bane, almost out of view, playing on the harp while she sang to an imaginary King James. We didn't forget old Ireland either, for one of the girls had learnt an old song from her grandmother, and the brogue was perfect. A num-

ber of sweet old Irish melodies followed. They were ail well-prepared, and seemed to be appreciated too. There was a song in pure Gaelic also, and I believe they made an attempt to get something Welsh, but failed. There were readings and recitations, all historic and interesting, especially one that was a touching account of an ancient emigration. Last of all came a tableau composed of three young girls standing with hands joined. Each wore a small crown and was dressed in one of the National Flags—English, Irish, and Scotch. Each recited a short union selection, and then they sang a trio. 'Twas thought we might close with "Auld Lang Syne," but I objected as I thought 'twas a drinkin' song, so we decided to have a simple chorus together, and close with "God Save the Queen."

This was the programme pretty much. I forgot to tell you when the supper came in, but then old maids are not supposed to remember everything, and always be proper like other folks. Seems to me folks generally fix one standard for themselves, and another for the old maids, as though it's a matter of course that they should be eccentric, and I think they try to make us out so, so's to justify the title they give us, though why we should be more so than other folks of our age, or young people that act without judgment I can't say. But there, I want to claim the eccentricity in this case as an excuse for my blunder.

Well, the supper was no blunder anyway; from beginning to end it was a success. The folks sat as long as they choose, and laughed and chatted and had a real good time. They seemed to enjoy the plain, old-fashioned fare, and also the staid old maids moving about so quietly and bein' always ready with their oatmeal-cookies, flaky potato-cakes and their old-fashioned tarts and pies and turnovers, and scones and fresh rolls with honey.

Everybody praised the cooking and ate their fill, and we got the thankfullest vote of thanks I ever heard. In spite of the way things disappeared, I don't think anybody got an attack of indigestion from anything they ate, for it was real hygienic cooking. You see we had several meetin's about it, and decided just what was to be provided and how it was to be prepared, and without wantin' to boast, I do say, and feel pretty sure, that no young man went out o' there with the beginning of an unhealthy appetite created either by treacherous flavorings or by delicate tidbits that serve to pamper and tantalize the taste rather than to satisfy a healthy appetite.

If more wives and mothers would become old maids instead and give their time to studying plain, healthy cookin', perhaps the world would soon see fewer diseased appetites, and self-indulgent sons, and—fewer dishonored graves.

While the Lord sees fit to delay the Millenium, (if it's really true that such a thing is to come), then I hope and trust he will deign to honor and bless, the prayers of an old maid.

THE END.



## Locked In.

IN the summer of some time since, Harry Trenton, who had for a year past been a farm-hand on a great vineyard in Fresno county, California, was beginning to think that advancement for him was slow, and that, as far as he could see, he might remain a farm-hand the rest of his life.

Trenton had worked hard and faithfully, and like many another young man before him, was now making the mistake of thinking that his hard work and faithfulness had not been noticed by his employer.

Before long he found out his error, for one evening Mr. Eller, the owner of the vineyard, sent for him, and when he arrived at the office, greeted him with the blunt but kindly remark: