

HOME CIRCLE.

MOTH AND RUST.

BY ALICE H. NEAL.

"I never could understand, Eliza, why you choose to bury yourself in that little country town, away from everybody and everything."

"I dare say not," returned Mrs. Mason, good-naturedly.

"And there you vegetate the year round," continued her sister, with the same ill-used expression of tone and face. "How you live without a summer's jaunt at the very least, within thirty miles of Saratoga, too! I don't believe you ever see it!"

"We were there three years ago, you recollect."

"Yes, I had to tease you into it though, and write that you would not see me at all if you did not come where I was. You haven't been in New York since that winter, and I don't believe you would have been now but for Harry's wedding."

"I don't think I should have been, Ellen; though you ought to know well enough not to be affronted at it."

"O, it's not that! But what is the use of having a decent income and a good position, and burying yourself where nobody ever sees or hears of you?"

"But we do have some very pleasant neighbours, and a great many people would miss us if we should move away. It would make a difference to some families."

"O, your poor people, and workpeople, and all that: it's the very thing I complain of. John says so, too. He's provoked whenever he thinks of it—that you should slave your life out for people that have no kind of claim on you. And then you get so behind the times. I believe you've had that dress the last five years."

"But, Ellen, it's a nice silk, and it's just as much in fashion as it ever was. I had it made plainly, and trimmed with the same, so that it might last. I could not afford to get a new walking-dress, and have a pretty evening-dress and cap for a wedding, too."

"I must say you looked very well at the wedding," and the recollection seemed to soothe Mrs. Bradford's irritation a little. "A great many remarked it, Lucy's friends, too, and they are all such fashionable people. To tell the truth, I was afraid you would think it your duty to look like a fright."

No, Mrs. Mason knew her duty better than that—better than to wound her sister's feelings or pride at the marriage of her only son with a fashionable woman. She knew the propriety of time and place too well to appear without a "wedding-garment;" it would not have been following the only rule of life she walked by—the golden rule.

It was for this reason that she had hesitated a little about accepting the invitation. She knew the unavoidable expense of the journey, and her dress would be more than she had been accustomed to allow herself; yet it would give her sister pleasure, and they had not met for a long time. The Masons were not poor, in the ordinary sense of the word. Mr. Mason had retired from business, to the surprise of everyone, just as he seemed in the very way to realize a large fortune, satisfied with a comfortable income—large indeed in the country place to which he removed. Mrs. Mason gave up her town house and fashionable acquaintances, gradually laying aside all extravagance in dress and style of living, as if they really were in straitened means. Mrs. Bradford could not understand it.

The two sisters went on with their morning occupations until Mrs. Bradford had finished looking over her list of calls, and shopping, and general engagements for the week. For a person who had just reproved another for "slaving," it was rather a formidable list, and would require a great deal of planning and calculation, and hard work to accomplish it.

"You did not say how you liked the new dinner-set, Eliza," she said, reminded of the omission by a memorandum "to call at Haugwout's and match wine glasses and goblets," broken at the wedding supper. "Every dessert plate is different: it's the handsomest set imported this year—the shapes are perfect."

"Yes, I noticed the style, and the painting. It was very beautiful, and very difficult to match, I suppose."

"Match! why, it can't be matched! That's the charm of it; it's the only one in the country."

"I should think you would dread to have it used."

"So I do. I never give a dinner without fear and

trembling—servants are so careless. What do you think I discovered this morning? A great scratch on my silver tea-kettle. One of the legs of the tripod was bent, too! and I have not had it six months! And there's the large silver waiter, had to go to Tiffany's, it was so dented and injured the other night. Tired as I was, I sat up an hour and a half counting spoons and forks, and hunting up things. We have everything it's possible to have in silver, for I like the family plate, I must say, and it will also go to Harry, so it's really a saving, you see."

Mrs. Mason could not see the saving, particularly if it was liable to loss and injury. She had already noticed the extensive additions made to the great plate safe, let in a recess in the dining-room. Of this Mrs. Bradford kept the key, and generally went herself every time it was required, not daring to trust the waiter. The ordinary tea-set, spoons, forks, etc., was carried to her room every night in a plate basket, and she was usually roused from her morning nap to set it outside the door, the waiter choosing to lay the table an hour before it was necessary.

"Your house seems to have everything heart could wish, certainly," Mrs. Mason said, feeling admiration was expected of her, and then in an instant reproached herself for her common-place remark, for she knew that what her heart most desired was wanting.

"But then, it's a monstrous deal of trouble to keep everything in order," sighed Mrs. Bradford, thinking of the damask curtains that must be attended to, having been almost ruined by the demolition of a tray of creams against them. "You can have no idea of it. John likes to have everything just so, and I do myself. It takes one person's whole time to be looking after things. I expect they will break one of the mirrors every time the parlour is cleaned, and I dust every Parian, and vase, and ornament, myself; only think of it! But I wouldn't let them touch the 'Ruth and Naomi' for as much as it is worth, or the 'Cleopatra,' or the 'Eve.'"

Mrs. Mason thought her sister was beginning to lay down a clear case of "slavery," much as she inveighed against it.

"But I must go and see about putting the French chalk on those curtains," continued Mrs. Bradford, and she darted up suddenly. I really wish you would help me, Eliza; I have so much to do to-day."

Mrs. Mason was at her sister's disposal, and accompanied her to the dining-room, or rather tea-room, where the mishap had taken place. Here appeared the cook for her orders, dinner company being expected, and Mr. Bradford being very particular as to the arrangements. A wrong gravy, or an overdone canvas-back duck, would spoil the whole pleasure of an entertainment for him.

"O, so the marketing has come. Well, I'll be down in a moment, Andrew. No mint for the lamb! Send Patrick off for it instantly! Mr. Bradford will never forgive my having lamb without it. And do, Patrick, be sure about the castor. When your master is dressing a salad, every instant is of importance; and don't keep him waiting for the egg, or have it served in a saucer, as it was the last time. Wine! Isn't the wine given out? There, Eliza, you see how it is from morning till night! And I don't believe the silver has been touched. Where's Patrick? The instant you come back, come to me for the key, and tell the cook to garnish the fish properly to-day. She sent up a delicious broiled salmon the last time without so much as a sprig of parsley or a scrap of an egg! Only think of it, Eliza!"

Unpardonable omission!

Mrs. Mason worked away at the curtain, while her sister made divers journeys to the kitchen, dining, and store-room, interrupted by the cook, waiter, and housemaids for special instructions in their several departments; and then she came back heated, wearied, and perplexed with fresh subjects for complaint and lamentation.

"There's no use trying to have anything here! What do you think I discovered in the laundry? Three cambric pillow-cases, with the deep French work, covered with iron-mould; and one of my best tablecloths, seven yards long—that one with Dinah and the hunt! Mr. Bradford's father brought it himself from Russia. There they were, rolled up in a heap, and put away damp, because Maria was too lazy to iron them yesterday. Next to silver, I must say, I like home linen, and as it will last for ever and ever, and do as well for Harry as us, I have the handsomest

I can get. Only think of it! ruined! salts of lemon hasn't the least effect. She's tried it, and taken a piece out of one of the pillow-cases."

This seemed very much like a contradiction to the statement that home linen "lasted for ever and ever." But to any one who shared in Mrs. Bradford's taste for thoroughly nice and handsome napery, her presses were as much to be admired as her plate was. She showed them to her sister with pardonable pride—pardonable in Mrs. Bradford—in the course of the morning. There were piles of pillow-slips, plain and highly ornamented; sheets smelling faintly of the dried lavender folded between them, an old-fashioned and delicate bit of housewifery Mrs. Bradford had retained; blankets as soft and fine as a lady's shawl; counterpanes of every variety and tint; yet, not a block from this luxurious mansion, the poor had died of cold and starvation the past winter; the aged, and sick, and little children, shivering with the cold so near this hoard of "purple and fine linen."

"And now we are here, I might as well show you my India scarf and shawl. I keep them in this camphor trunk; and my fur boxes are here, too; so you might as well see my sables at the same time."

Mrs. Bradford lifted two very handsome hearth-rugs from the trunk, and knelt to unlock it. "I've tried rather an experiment this year. I dislike the smell of tobacco and all those sort of things so much, that I concluded to try a way I saw recommended in an English magazine, just to have the thing beaten out, and aired well, and pinned up in linen without anything. Gunter's foreman told me that tobacco was all nonsense. Here are my crape shawls, the white and scarlet, but you've seen these, and they're so common nowadays, I never think of wearing them."

The camphor chest held quite a collection of foreign boxes and packages, the dull, silken covers of the Chinese cases being the most prominent. The shawls, which had been replaced in Mrs. Bradford's affections by the still more costly cashmeres, were folded as smoothly, and in as excellent a state of preservation as when they first arrived. Stewart or Beck would have taken them at very little discount from the first heavy cost; but Mrs. Bradford would not have dreamed of selling them, though she probably would never wear them again, now that they were "common."

Mrs. Mason could appreciate the rare shade and delicate texture of the cashmere proudly submitted for her inspection. In her fashionable days, a cashmere was the desire of her heart. Here was just the style it would have suited; it would have been much more becoming to her tall, delicate figure than Mrs. Bradford's broad shoulders. She could not restrain an exclamation of pleasure as she gathered the graceful folds in her hands, and was conscious of the feminine wish to "try it on"—a lingering vanity she did not suspect herself of before.

"Now, how much do you suppose I gave for both?" asked Mrs. Bradford. Just look at the border of this scarf; and such a lovely shade, too! I happened to be in Stewart's the morning they were opened, and I consider them great bargains. Only nine hundred for the two."

Mrs. Mason had seen more than the border when the scarf was held up to the light. She might be mistaken; she hoped she was; but she thought she discovered the minute traces of moth-holes! Yes, there they were, and the dusty rolls clinging to the thick wool of the border were seen in another instant by Mrs. Bradford herself. The shawl, too, when it came to be examined, had been attacked by some insidious enemy. Mrs. Bradford tore open her fur-boxes, and shook the costly cape and muff in the sunshine. Alas for experiments! the black feathery particles flew out in a shower, and one of the rich tips came off in her hands.

It was a catastrophe that put all thoughts of visits and shopping out of the question; her chief treasures had sustained irreparable injury, and a paltry pair of embroidered moccasins, purchased at Niagara the year before, had been the cause of all the mischief.

Mrs. Mason felt her lingering love for such perishable finery rebuked, as her sister lamented her folly and its consequence, particularly as she had intended the shawls for Harry's wife at some future day, and so thought them good investments of the large sums paid for them. The suit of sables, purchased only the winter before, were, in their way, quite as choice and costly.

As dinner-time approached, Mrs. Bradford was sum-