

At half-past seven she was stationed down by the gate. She had little time for anticipation, for somebody sprang through the gate, or over it, and greeted Mollie with the freedom of an old acquaintance. It was a merry-faced young gentleman, with blue eyes and brown curls.

"My respects to the dragon," said the new-comer, bowing to the house with great deference. "My respects to Wilkins and your unfortunate sister. How have I become blessed with the opportunity of seeing you?"

"Auntie and Mr. Wilkins are at a tea party, and Jane's gone to a prayer meeting. Hurry, Tom! Come down in the garden, or somebody'll be sure to see you. I've locked up the house, you can stay till just half-past eight."

"One hour! Momentarily expecting that the dragon will fall upon me! I don't care if she does!"

"Stop calling her a dragon, Tom, and don't talk so, if you have any pity for me."

"Quite tragic! Excuse me for saying so, Mollie, but how ridiculous all this is! Here we have been engaged a year, and you frown if I bow to you in the street; you scarcely let me show my head near this house, and you won't hear of my speaking to your aunt. If I walk past here I discover Miss Polly glaring out of the parlor window, or Wilkins squinting out of the front door. If I look at you twice in church I'm the object of Miss Polly's furious attention. Now, I say it's ridiculous! I'm not a Gorgon—I'm a respectable young man—at least, I always thought so. Can't you go and tell your aunt you want to get married, if you don't think I'm competent to arrange matters?"

"You know I would if I dared, Tom; but aunt is dreadful. I do try sometimes, but I can't, really, I can't."

"What's to prevent? Will she put an end to your existence, or shut you up on bread and water?"

"She'd disown me, Tom. She'd cut me off without a shilling, and never hear my name spoken again."

"Is that all? I'll own you, and give you twenty shillings for every one she won't give you, besides bestowing my name upon you. Come, that's an offer."

"I will not give the conversation in detail. Suffice it to say that it was nearly nine o'clock when Mr. Hall, having exhausted all his arguments without effect, finally became indignant, and determined to depart."

"He was making one final appeal to Mollie, who, still unconvinced, and still lacking in courage, sat sobbing on the bench before him, when they both heard the gate close softly, and saw dimly two figures turning towards the garden."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Mollie, in terrified accents. "Tom, the pear-trees!"

Before Tom quite knew what he was about, he had followed Mollie, or had been dragged by her, under the shadow of the trees, and was stationed behind a flourishing clump of lilacs.

"This is a proceeding—" he began, then suddenly checked himself to listen.

The voices were very near to them now, and a moment after another miserable couple seated themselves on the same bench which the concealed pair had left so unceremoniously.

"Poor little Mollie!" said Jane, mournfully, glancing back at the dark house. "She has gone to bed long ago, I daresay! I wish I was as happy as Mollie! Oh, what would she think of me if she knew?"

"Think?" replied the voice of Mr. Lyman Ellis. "I own it wouldn't be very agreeable to be discovered lurking about the house in this fashion, but if you will allow me to go to your aunt to-morrow morning, and tell her I wish to marry you, she could think or say nothing unpleasant. You are sacrificing your happiness and mine to a miserable caprice. Your aunt happens to have a prejudice against marriage, and so you promise yourself to remain single till she dies."

"Oh, don't speak so! Love Aunt Polly everything, and her death will be the greatest misfortune in the world to me."

"All the benefits in the world give her no right to dictate in a matter like this."

"I know."

"Well, then, consider me a little—you consider her so much—let me come here to-morrow and speak to her plainly."

"Oh, I dare not! Oh, Lyman, what shall I do? There she comes now!"

In fact, two more figures were discernible coming through the gate, unmistakably the figures of Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins. They seemed in no hurry to go in, but stood leaning on the fence in the moonlight and talking. Presently—oh, disastrous movement—they were seen sauntering slowly towards the garden.

"What shall I do?" gasped Jane, again, in the very extremity of terror.

"Come under the shade," said Mr. Ellis. "She won't perceive us."

In a moment they were crouching so near to the retreat of their fellow-sufferers that the recumbent Mr. Hall could have touched Mr. Ellis's coat-tails.

"This moon is delightful!" was the first remark of Miss Polly that reached their ears.

"It is!" responded Mr. Wilkins. "Hum—it is. Enchanting. I love to walk by moonlight."

"It makes me quite—hum—sad—lonesome."

"Ah!" said Miss Polly, sympathizingly.

"I—hum—feel as if I hadn't a friend in the—hum—the world."

"That's strange!"—Miss Polly stopped to gather a rose—"when you have so many."

"You are—hum—mistaken. Hum—I haven't one."

"I'm sure I'm your friend, Mr. Wilkins!" said Miss Polly, speaking lower and putting the rose before her face.

Mr. Wilkins immediately became bewildered in a desert of "hums."

"He—hum—hum—he wished she would—hum—ah—he wished he could—hum—believe it."

"I should think you might," rejoined Miss Polly, "when I say it. I suppose the thought of your past happiness is rather trying."

"Hum—no. I—hum—could be—hum—happier than I—hum—ever was."

"Indeed!"

"I—hum—assure you. If—if—you—hum—thought so."

"Don't!" exclaimed Miss Polly. "Remember your—think of Mrs. Wilkins dead and gone."

Mr. Wilkins was so abashed by this outburst that he said absolutely nothing for five minutes. Miss Polly got out of patience.

"You weren't congenial," she said. "I see. Ah, that is trying!"

Mr. Wilkins was betrayed again, and declared he—hum—never knew what—hum—congeniality was till lately. Would she, hum—hum—let him say so?

"Don't—speak to me!" exclaimed Miss Polly, sinking down on the hum-enduring bench. "I am a disgrace to myself! Oh, if those girls should hear this, what would they say?"

Those girls! There was such a merry shout of laughter behind her! It pealed forth upon the startled ears of Miss Polly and Mr. Wilkins, frightening them nearly into fits. When they recovered a little there were Tom and Mollie on one side, Jane and Mr. Ellis on the other, the last two looking very surprised.

In an instant Mollie's arms were round her aunt's neck, and she was crying.

"We'll say you're the dearest auntie in the world! Be good now."

"Be magnanimous," put in Tom. "You see, we've all found each other out."

"And are all equally culpable," enjoined Mr. Ellis.

Miss Polly Whittlesea was a wise woman. I shouldn't have written about her if she hadn't been wise. And when she saw that fate favored her desires, she did not try to undo the doings of fate.

For reasons of her own she had determined to try her fortunes matrimonially; and when she found her niece inclined thus also, she agreed to let them go along with her for shipwreck or prosperity, remembering that if she did otherwise her example and precept would contradict each other.

Oh, acute Miss Polly! Thus it happened that three weddings took place in one day.

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

MY DEAR NIECES:—

Too many complaints are made by parents about the distaste of their children to follow the life on the old farm. They crowd into cities, some succeed, many fail and return sadder and wiser; but the fault lies at home in too many cases. It is work, work, and never an hour allowed the young animal to frolic. All this is unnatural, and, if restricted, they will go where they will get what is only just and right; and recreations are as attainable in our country homes as in cities, and a part of the lawn before our house can be levelled and sodded, at a small outlay of time, to play such games as cricket, football, lacrosse or baseball, lawn tennis or croquet—such games as all boys delight in, and some strong seats can be placed where those interested in them can sit and watch; for it is poor comfort to sprawl upon the damp grass, either for old or young. On this ground can be played matches for championships, and we then see who our children's friends are, and can counsel and advise in the choice of them. The village green is not the best place for a playing ground; the close proximity to the tavern, and the loafers that always haunt it, are only some of the many objections to it. Give your boys an outfit for any game they wish, or better still, let them earn it. Offer small prizes for matches won or championships held, and you will feel well repaid in freedom from anxiety regarding their whereabouts and their companionship. Many a day in Autumn, when work is slack, those boys will take up their bats and have a merry practice, instead of sneaking away to something vicious. Lawn tennis nets can be netted by our girls, or even boys, as we are gathered in for the evening, and croquet setts, bats, wickets, hoops and all, can be made by the boys and girls in our own workshop. Encourage their efforts to excel in such manly and exciting games by every effort in your power. Serve light refreshments when they ask their friends up for a practice. And how a cup of nice tea, milk or coffee touches the right spot when tired and warm from the exercise; it will cost little and pay a large dividend. Give your children more play of an elevating sort. They will love home and you more when you change from the hard task-master to the sympathetic friend.

MINNIE MAY.

Domestic Martyrs.

BY A. M. C.

I have always contended that self-sacrifice may be carried too far, that there are countless wives and mothers who find the fruit thereof very bitter. Here are two cases, told by a writer in one of the best American Magazines. She went into a country home recently and found the woman suffering excruciating pain from sciatica. Hardly a step could be taken without groaning, yet the poor creature was limping bravely from table to stove and back again, frying doughnuts. The visitor suggested that there were more healthful things that did not require one quarter as much time and trouble. The answer was, "My husband would hunt another boarding place if I didn't make a batch of doughnuts twice a week, dead or alive."

Pearls before swine! Did not that woman know that she was ruining her health and shortening her life by such work that she was guilty of suicide as truly as though she had taken a dose of slow poison?

Another woman says, "When I leave some of the killing things undone my conscience torments me. For instance, I didn't make any mince-meat this year; I really wasn't able, and besides, I knew we were better without it. But when I hear my husband say, with a sigh, 'It seems awful strange not to have mince pies,' and when my little boy remarks with enthusiasm, 'you ought to have had a bite of Mrs. Smith's mince pie, mamma—'twasn't any better than yours used to be but you bet, it tasted good,' then I cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called happy. After simplifying my work to the utmost I am still overburdened, but the tears spring to my eyes every time I hear mince pies mentioned."

Both these women established an unwelcome precedent when they began housekeeping. Then they were young and strong, and it was a pleasure to minister in every possible way to their husband's comfort. After a while the newness wears off this work, and while the favorite dishes are just as eagerly looked for, the man of the house forgets to praise them and to compliment the skill and industry of his devoted cook. By and by he demands as a right what was first given as a favor, a courtesy.

A clever writer has well said, "a woman makes a grievous mistake when she begins her life-work by making an epicure of her husband. Men do not, cannot realize how much work it takes to concoct the dishes they are so fond of and with which their palates were tickled by their loving and enthusiastic partners. It is an awful thing to commence life with the assumption that man is an animal whose appetite must be appeased by browned (not burnt) offerings. A woman of ordinary tact, who has not worn herself completely out by this stuffing process, can, by degrees bring about a better condition of things. She can substitute a simple and healthful dish for an elaborate and indigestible one. The woman who spends all her force in ministering to the material wants of her household is doing a great wrong to herself and to her family."

There are other forms of domestic martyrdom. We have all seen the woman who is doing the work of two or three that the husband may be spared the expense of a servant's wages. This type is not confined to the poor and uneducated class. The wife of a clever, ambitious, professional man said to me recently, "I try to economize in every

possible way—do all my own cooking, all the sewing for myself and the children, and all but the heaviest washing. I try to keep everything in good order, but it keeps me on the jump. I never know an idle moment—never get time to read, except when I'm nursing; and my husband says he is almost ashamed to ask me to play for his friends, I've neglected my music so, but I cannot get time to practice at all." By and by, when this man reaches the position he is striving for, and finds the companion of his youth a mere broken-down, prematurely aged housemaid, he will realize that there is such a thing as false economy.

Longfellow, in his description of the ideal home, or rather the ideal couple, says:—

"They want no guests to come between
Their tender glances like a screen,
To tell them tales of land or sea,
Or whatsoever may betide.
The great forgotten world outside.
They want no guests. They needs must be
Each other's own best company."

This sentiment is all right during the honeymoon—it certainly should not survive the first quarter. The parents who entertain little or not at all are doing an immense injury to themselves and their children. This is especially true of country people whose occupation does not as a rule bring them into daily contact with outsiders. Country life always brings with it more or less seclusion, and this is felt most by the women. They have less companionship than men. They don't "change work" with their neighbors, nor sit around the stove in the corner grocery on wet days and winter nights, nor do they have the pleasure of listening frequently to some philanthropic individual who is "running for parlment" discussing the great questions of the day. The nearest approach to such companionship is when Mrs. Farmer takes her knitting and goes over to spend the afternoon and have tea with the neighbor on the next farm. Beyond what she sees in the weekly paper she knows little or nothing of what is going on in the "great forgotten world outside." If she has a young family, her information is dealt out in stray sentences by John, who sits, paper in hand, while she mends the little c'oths that are never quite whole. Occasionally she hears John "talk politics" with the hired man or with some neighbor who has dropped in, but what is gained by listening day after day to the same idea? Ignorance, dense, pitiable ignorance, is the price we pay for shutting ourselves in from our fellow-creatures. Seclusion means death to the best powers of the mind.

"We do not care for mere acquaintances," said that very exclusive hero, John Halifax, and his listener agreed with him. Nevertheless there are few people who would not increase our knowledge or strengthen our virtue. The larger the circle of acquaintances, the better. In deciding whether or not we shall entertain largely, we settle whether we shall absorb the wit, wisdom and virtue of others or be content with our own little share.

Seclusion is particularly dangerous for those in delicate health. It fosters a gloomy, despondent disposition, that always magnifies ailments. Bring in some bright, sensible, cheerful person, and observe the effect. Does not Solomon say that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine?"

We have all noticed what influence the presence of company has on the home life. Politeness, with some people, is a plant that never blossoms but in the sunshine of a stranger's presence. It is well that we catch its fragrance even then. Then let us look for our wise old friends, and make new ones among the best people we know, and invite them to our homes. For though privacy may be a forcing place for the softer emotions, for an all-around development of body, mind and soul, "it is not good for man to be alone."

Receipts.

STEAMED APPLE DUMPLINGS.

Mix up a dough with one quart of flour, one pint of sour cream, one teaspoonful of soda, and a little salt. Slice the apples and put them in a pot. Put enough water in to cook the apples. Roll the dough out so as to cover the apples closely; make an opening in the centre of the dough, so as to let the steam escape. When done the dough will be raised up several inches thick. Eat with sauce.

PEACH SWEET PICKLE.

(From Francatellis.)

Pare peaches that are nearly ripe, weigh them, and put in a porcelain kettle with half their quantity of sugar, a pint of vinegar to each pound, cloves, allspice and cinnamon, and cook them until the syrup looks a little thick. To a peck of peaches twelve cloves, a tablespoonful of allspice and one of cinnamon will be sufficient.

EGG PRESERVER.

Put one-half pint of salt, one pint of unslacked lime and three gallons of soft water into a six-gallon vessel; mix well and let settle. Put the eggs in slowly so as not to crack any. If any rise, take them out as they are spoiled or stale. Fresh eggs will always sink. If you put in fresh eggs you will certainly take out good ones. This receipt has been used for over twenty years and never failed but once, when the quantities of lime and salt were reversed. The above is sufficient for twenty-five dozen of eggs.

TO KEEP PLUMS.

Select perfect plums, which are not too ripe, and fill a large crock, putting them in carefully so as not to break the skins. Then cover them with water, which must be poured on boiling hot, and turn over them a plate which will fit into the crock easily, allowing none of the plums to rise above it. The water should be level with the top. Keep the crock in the cellar and cover it with a board. A scum will rise on the plums during the winter, which helps to keep them. When wanted for use scald them, pour off the water, add more, and stew until tender. Sweeten to taste.

Tortoise shell, as it comes to the market in the West Indies, is coarse, dirty and lustreless, and only the most skillful and patient manipulation makes it the rich and beautiful material it eventually becomes.