

THE PHILOSOPHY OF STOCKING DARNING.

BY A. M. HELLIER.

Stocking-darning has both a science and a history. Of the science I shall not treat, because most darners believe that they have sufficient practical acquaintance with the art to serve their purpose. And employers of darners are more interested in the results than in the process; or, rather, it is the absence of result that chiefly concerns them. For if the lords of the creation find a well-darned supply of hose to meet their oft-recurring needs, they accept it, like we accept too many of our common blessings, as a mere matter of course.

Nor shall I explore the history of darning, for its records are scanty, and we are not wholly past the Primitive Age, as the lone bachelor at the mercy of washerwomen can testify. And though the distance is very great between the coarse efforts he deplores, and the prize specimens shown to the School Board inspector, or the delicate repairs on a silken stocking that every lady can achieve, it is to be hoped that the art is still far from perfection, and that future generations may discover less tedious modes of darning the more durable stocking which I trust will fall to their lot.

There are other, more interesting aspects under which we may consider stocking-darning. It has been chosen as the type of minor domestic duties. If a lady, especially a married lady, takes an active interest in public affairs—if she speaks on a platform or agitates for votes—certain circles in society begin to talk darkly about "neglected stockings." We must all of us, at one time or another, when women's rights were discussed, have heard some impassioned orator hold up for scorn and ridicule "the woman who cannot boil a potato, or darn a stocking."

If a woman, again, has a reputation for learning, slander asserts that her stockings are in holes. This is especially the case when she has the temerity to study any of the dead languages. No woman will do that, if she wishes to be thought a notable housekeeper. She may learn French, she may study music, or singing, or painting for years, with no serious result. But once let her begin Latin or Greek (one hardly dare mention Hebrew), and her competence to darn will be held in doubt. "Look at her stocking-heels," is a Yorkshire proverb often quoted in this connection.

Nor can it be denied that there does exist, here and there, a Jellaby among women, just as every now and then one finds a man who has never shown himself capable of earning his daily bread. But the phenomenon is rare. Personally, I have never known any woman who was not alive to the importance of ordinary domestic duties, and I trust I never shall.

It is often said in disparagement of women that they have not originated or invented much. They have not; but it is their devotion to the minor details of life which has set men free to distinguish themselves, and in all men's achievements women have an unacknowledged part.

Home, especially the English home, has inspired volumes of poetry and floods of oratory. It is a subject on which we can all speak from the heart. But when we come to consider any one home in particular, we soon realise how entirely its essential character, its home-likeness, depends on the details of comfort supplied by the women who care for it. The family sense of well-being does not consist in the romantic surroundings, or architectural beauty, or artistic furnishing of a house, so much as in the cleanliness, the order, the serving of the meals, the homely work—in fact, the stocking-darning of the establishment. It is impossible to conceive of perfect family love permitting a state of perpetual discomfort, or of mutual affection remaining untroubled and undiminished amid the friction which such a state would occasion. That home only can be serenely happy where the daily homely duties are well done—not intermittently, not in a whirlwind of bewildering activity that scares the male population from the scene, but—I need not say how; I appeal to the inner consciousness of woman. What dignity, what beauty and delight it gives our humblest work to think of it as essential to the peace and comfort of English homes, and as enabling those to labour undisturbed who win our bread, and create our literature, and rule and teach our people!

And verily women need some such consolation. Consider how much of their work perishes in the day that it is done, and has all to be repeated day after day, and then say whether it is matter for great marvel that some of them have been ill-advised enough to talk occasionally about their "narrow sphere."

The changes are rung on washing, and ironing, and cleaning, and mending days, while every morning the same familiar objects demand washing or dusting, that have been washed or dusted thousands of times before. Tangible results are not what woman chiefly accomplishes, and she often works long and hard without having "anything to show" in the end. There is poetry in her life, it is true, but there is an enormous amount of prose. And sometimes I wish, when a man expresses horror at some woman's escaping from her house-work to a wider field of action, that he would try a long-continued course of dusting, washing up, and mending stockings, and see if he ever found it at all monotonous.

But the consolation of affording leisure to the great, and comfort to all, is by no means a woman's chief inspiration. There is another she loves and longs for—one she ought always to have, yet often lacks. It is appreciation. The drudgery of household life is glorified by the love that fulfils it for the sake of the love that receives and rewards it. And the mistress who passes over her servants' faithful work in silence, only speaking of the neglected duties; the children who are slow to see where their comfort is studied, and quick to complain if their least exaction is not satisfied; the husbands, sons, and brothers that take all service as their due, and make capital out of a small omission; the being, whoever he or she may be, whose only evidence of being satisfied is the negative one of not complaining, deserves a life of unmitigated stocking-darning. There are too many people who, like the kitten in Mrs. Gatty's Parable, never "purr" when they are pleased." The reader will remember how this misguided kitten gave so much dissatisfaction, and missed so much comfort out of life, that at last he strove to conquer his reticence. He choked a little to begin with, but was finally rewarded by a permanently brightened existence. To receive kindness with grace, is an art that needs and repays cultivation.

It must be borne in mind, however, that we all, though working cheerfully for the most appreciative of mankind, shall yet do much work for which no one is ever the wiser. Stocking-darning is a fit emblem of obscure work. It is tedious, it is slow, it is not showy, and thus it becomes a test of conscientiousness. If there is a great heap of stockings, and if they are to go on heedless feet, how great the temptation to coddle! What patience, what principle is required to produce regular, even darns! How true a picture this is of much of our daily work: of the tiresome job that could so easily be scamped, and no one apparently be the worse for it! But second thoughts come to the rescue, and we know that our work, though done in solitude, and hidden in corners, will harm at least ourselves if not faithfully performed. If any one allows himself to bungle the work that does not show, and only takes pains with that for which he can get credit, alas for the work and the workman too! Alas for his self-respect! Alas for the canker that has begun to eat into his life!

But this point needs guarding. There is a difference between honest work and faddism, and there is such a thing as going on after we have done. There is a stage in the history of every stocking when further labour spent on it is wasted; and it needs judgment to strike the balance aright between economy of stocking and economy of time. Women are peculiarly liable to spend over-much strength and sweetness in fads. Housekeeping possesses a potent spell that has sometimes charmed them into living more for their furniture than for their families; into taking unto themselves more and yet more goods to protect, dust, and arrange, till life becomes one mere round of housekeeping; as if houses were more than souls, and furniture than hearts. Too much stocking-darning is a more common evil than too little, and while proper attention to it, with all it represents, is as essential to most women's lives as having dinner and tea, on the other hand, if it is not kept in its proper place—if she allows herself to be always talking and thinking darning, so that her magic beauty of spring only inspires her with the desire to "clean down," and the glory of autumn suggests nothing more than winter jackets and petticoats—she will become more and more uninteresting to herself and every one else.

A large block of wooden buildings in the Chinatown of Victoria, B. C., has been burned by order the city council to make room for a new public market. It was deemed advisable to get rid of the old rockeries in this way instead of by removal, so as to avoid all danger of sickness. The Chinese theatre was among the buildings burned.

Good Hints for Brides.

From time immemorial the bride's gown has been white; and if one could only have a simple muslin frock it seems as if it ought to be of that pure tone, because her own heart is thought to be as clean and white as is her gown. The white gown and the orange blossoms are the privilege of the bride, and even if she has to economize and give up another gown I can quite appreciate the feelings of the girl who insists on the white satin, the blossoms and the tulle veil. She can never wear this costume but once in her life, for after she has become a wife, roses must take the place of the orange blossoms and the tulle veil is never again assumed. Heavy white-corded silk, white velvet, white brocade, white mousseline de soie are all shown for the bride's gown; but the real wedding material is white satin. True, it grows yellow with age, as does ivory, but if love is young in the heart there will be the same delight in looking at the folds in the wedding-gown that there is in recalling the wedding day.

A widow who is being married for the second time, may wear any color she wishes, if she is in travelling costume; but in full dress, she must have either pale gray or mauve; or, if she prefers, some other becoming color, but never white; nor should she wear orange blossoms. Roses, daisies, or whatever flower is suited to the shade of her frock, are proper; but the white, sweet smelling blossom belongs entirely to the young girl.

Somebody asks how to arrange a veil and how far it should extend. You cannot buy a veil by the yard; that is to say, you cannot tell how much you need; the proper way is to have the storekeeper send a piece of tulle and then drape it on the bride's head. It should fall well over her train though not beyond it, and should reach the edge of her skirt in front. The orange blossoms are put on so that they are only visible after the veil is thrown back, which ceremony should be performed by two of the bridesmaids when the newly made husband leans forward to kiss the bride.

In all large cities there are hair-dressers who make a business of arranging bride's veils, but in smaller ones these helpful people are not always to be found; so just remember in putting it on that while it is light as air it still must be firmly pinned in position, and the orange blossoms well in place, so that when the front part is thrown back they will present a perfectly well arranged appearance.

If one wished, tulle could be substituted for the pearl decoration on the costume pictured, and it would, of course, make it much less expensive. By-the-by, it should always be remembered that no matter how beautiful the neck and arms of a bride are she is sinning against good form who does not have a high-neck and long-sleeved bodice, for it must be remembered that she is not going to a dance or a reception, but to a religious ceremony that means the joy or misery of her future life, and, while everything may be as merry as a marriage bell, in the bride's frock there should be an expression of her knowledge of that which she was undertaking.

A Thoughtful Wife.

On the first night out, just as my vis-a-vis at table was sitting down to dinner in the beautiful saloon of the City of New York, a steward stepped up to him and handed him a letter, saying: "With the captain's compliments, sir." Every night this performance was repeated. Sometimes the captain himself presented the letter. It was mysterious and interesting. The gentleman who received the letter seemed to be much astonished when it came to him on the first occasion, but afterward he merely showed enjoyment on reading its contents. He was a very delightful man, and a great favorite at our table; but, though everybody was dying to know where the letter came from, nobody had enough impudence to ask him. But on the day before we reached New York I happened to be standing on the companion-way with this gentleman, when the captain presented the letter, and the former said, as he tore open the envelope:

"Queer idea of my wife's isn't it? She sent the captain seven letters addressed to me, and asked him to deliver one to me every evening before dinner. She thought I would be glad to hear from her every day; and I tell you it has been one of the pleasantest events of the voyage, this mail delivery in mid-ocean."

Railway carriages were in the first instance intended for well-to-do people; they were even designed and painted outwardly in imitation of the rival coach.

Long Engagements.

Owing to the complications of modern life and the large increase in the list of creature comforts which polite people have come to regard as necessities, marriage has become a vastly more serious undertaking than it used to be, and is deferred until a later period of life.

People in cities who have been used to wearing good clothes, and to have servants to wait on them, and to go out of town in Summer, no longer marry when the girl is 18 and the man 22. The man is apt to be nearing 30 before his income will stand the matrimonial strain, and the lady is proportionately experienced. It would not be quite accurate to say that, though it is harder to get married than it was, it is as easy as ever to become engaged. That would not be quite true. The difficulty of getting income enough to marry does defer, and even prevent, a great many betrothals; nevertheless, engagements do often happen when the prospect of marriage is remote, and a reasonable percentage of them last until marriage ends them.

Long engagements are not popular, but enough of them are running to make the behaviour of their beneficiaries a fit subject for comment in the interest of human happiness. All the world loves a lover, but lovers make a serious mistake when they presume too far on the strength of the world's regard for them.

The polite world loves its lovers exactly so long as they are interesting and agreeable.

When they cease to be so its sentiments towards them take the form of anxiety. They have them married, which may indeed be so extreme as to result in practical efforts to put them in the way of pairing, but which is more apt to take the form of what is vulgarly known as the cold shoulder.

Lovers who are intelligent and who are disposed to make themselves agreeable ought to be exceptionally charming. They are enveloped in a pleasant blaze of sentiment which makes them interesting. So long as they are nice, all kind people are in a conspiracy to indulge them and make them think that life is lurid with rose tints. Their politeness is the more appreciated because it is thought to involve especial self-sacrifice, and whatever they do for the community's amusement is rated above its ordinary value because they have done it. All the worse, then, when lovers regard themselves as temporarily exempt from the ordinary obligations of politeness, and abandon themselves to spooning and mutual absorption. —(Scribner's Magazine.)

How to Preserve the Voice.

How to preserve the voice and keep it presumably fresh is almost like asking how to keep from growing old. Some people grow faster than others because they are imprudent and do not take care of themselves. The voice should not be imposed upon, and instead of growing husky in a decade it should remain comparatively fresh for two and even four decades. Patti's voice is a fine example of one that has never been imposed upon, never been forced to sing six nights in a week and once at a matinee. A grand opera singer should sing only twice a week, perhaps three times if his or her physical condition warrants it. Singers should have plenty of sleep, good appetites, nothing to make them nervous, and, if possible, a more or less phlegmatic disposition. The latter they rarely possess to any great degree. Overwork is death to a voice. A singer will not notice at first the inroads that gradually undermine a voice and leave it an echo of its former sweetness.

The Change in Woman's Dress.

The elaborately-dressed woman, on the street especially, is destined to be a rarity. Flashy styles will be given over to the marked women who seek for attention—attention so far as the criticisms of their own sex and the sneers of the men are concerned. That the time is ripe for a material change in the fashions is conceded by all women of taste and intelligence. Styles have run to the extreme, until only a little distance remained to the point of the exceedingly ridiculous. The strain on the purse has been severely felt. Changes, and of a radical nature, became so frequent that even the wealthy found difficulty in keeping pace with them. The reaction which has set in is both timely and healthy. Women on every hand are welcoming the dawn of the simple in dress, while man will have extended to him the honor he has always esteemed the greatest could be conferred upon him—to walk the street with a woman in neat, but simple, attire.