

## THE CAPTAIN'S RETREAT.

Elta Matheson, Omaha, June 1, 1899.

It was the early breakfast hour when the birds who must be up betimes if they would capture the worm, filed in an hour earlier than the ladies and gentlemen of leisure. Here and there a tailor gowned woman appeared, her presence accounted for most likely by the advertisements of exceptional bargains. The brown haired young lady opposite me is a stenographer, and I am told a good one; the gray haired woman by my side is principal of one of our graded schools, the military looking man to my left earns his daily pork by sizing up hogs in Omaha, and I, well, it does not matter why I am breakfasting at 7 o'clock. We had given our orders and were at liberty to inquire the cause of the military gentleman's sputtering over something he had been reading in his morning's paper. "There is a whole lot of truth in this I tell you," tapping the paper as he unfolded his napkin still damp from the press.

"What is it all about?" some one inquired. "It is a well deserved slam at the women of every degree who persist in flocking into all kinds of business positions, thereby crowding out the men and utterly demoralizing home life; there are precious few homes now a days worth the name and the old time "home keeping heart" of woman is a thing of the past. They put up homes now in tin cans and paper boxes by machinery." The Captain, who, by the way, is an old bachelor was evidently sincere and no one spoke for a moment, then the little stenographer, whom we all familiarly call "Bertie" broke in spiritedly "Now it makes me mad to hear and read so much nonsense on that subject." Bertie often announced that she was "hopping mad" when every feature proclaimed a serenity unrivalled by the sweet June day just yawning into full consciousness. "What are a lot of us to do I would like to know, in order to supply ourselves with enough shirt waists and a Knox sailor every season?" "There, that is half the trouble," grumbled the Captain "You must have a Knox sailor of course and pay \$4.00 more than is necessary for your looks or comfort." "You are well informed Captain," Bertie replied airily, "but if there were enough good men to go around, who could earn a decent living for themselves and some one else, perhaps we might be encouraged to take up cooking. I think perhaps some woman may be running a type writer now because forsooth you have failed in your duty to a daughter of Eve." Bertie was saucy, we expected it of her, I am not sure but we encouraged it.

"That part of it would make a long story Miss Bertie, I might tell it to you some day, to prove that at least the neglect of duty was not intentional, if you could listen to an old man's ramblings, perhaps I might "dictate" it." He smiled at her with kindly eyes and Bertie had the grace at least to look apologetic. "However," he continued, "this thing is no joke; mechanical contrivances are doing what used to be willing work of loving hands, I'm actually afraid it won't be a great while before we will be just compelled to stop in at the nearest pharmacy and buy our meals in capsules; I do hope they will have it arranged so I will be sure whether I am eating my dinner or taking my tonic. I will just illustrate my fears for you and relate a bit of an experience I had a few evenings since. We have a man in our employ to whom I have taken a great fancy and whose wife is also employed by our firm in the office. Jack as I call him has often wanted me to come and see them so last Tuesday evening after supper I went up to their house. It is needless to state from my standpoint I found only an apology for a home; I am perhaps too observant but there was

certainly a good deal of undisturbed dust apparent and a total lack of that 'homey' air about the room where we sat, which when it does exist, goes so straight to your heart and makes you feel that for the time being at least you are a friend and not a stranger within the gates. About ten o'clock my friend said, "Mollie can't we have some kind of a lunch?" Mollie laughed easily, "We can try Jack but I have no idea what there is in the house; if you men will come out with me we can skirmish around." I protested that I was not hungry but it was of no avail and we descended upon the kitchen and pantry.

"Shades of my fore mothers! The supper dishes stood unwashed in the sink and several broods of flies feasting on the remnants of the evening meal were evidently much annoyed by our sudden appearance. After considerable fussing around a can of salmon, one or baked beans and a glass of jelly put up by some celebrated Purveyors to her Majesty the American housewife, were unearthed; but our troubles were not at an end for Mollie exclaimed suddenly in a tone of dismay, "O, Jack we have not a bite of bread in the house; do go over and borrow a loaf from Mrs. C."

"I hate to Mollie we have borrowed bread from her twice within the last week." "Never mind she will not care and I can pay her back tomorrow—if I don't forget!" she said to me in a laughing aside.

The bread having been procured by the unwilling Jack we were about to sit down to our hardly won lunch when Mollie discovered that her alcohol bottle was empty and she could not make the "drawin' of tea" as she had intended. This necessitated another delay while poor Jack went to the drug store below to repair the lack. And this was Jack's home life I pondered. Mollie was stylish to the last degree; her garments rustled with the real "swish" for which I verily believe some women would peril their souls; I kept wondering how she would look in one of those wide generous gingham aprons I remember my mother used to wear. I am aware this criticism sounds unkind but that is not the way I feel about it. Jack earns enough to keep Mollie in every comfort if only she would be willing to have a fewer number of silk lined frocks, and did not hate to cook. Such a haphazard existence seems awful to me in memory of the beautiful home life which surrounded me as a child and boy. I wonder what my mother would have done had she hated to cook for her husband and children. "Have Jack and Mollie any children?" queried Bertie. "Fortunately no; if they had I suppose they would can them." Miss B. had been an interested listener to the Captain's story and as he concluded she leaned forward and said gravely "Captain, I have a picture in my mind of that old fashioned home so dear to your memory, may I give it to you and see if it is a true one?" Most certainly Madam," replied the Captain courteously.

"It is a picture without much high light, but cool and sweet, set in a frame of green. There are flowers about the front, they border a path; in the rear a garden leading to a red barn where patient eyed cows come gratefully at even tide. When the day is done and the father comes home a troop of little children greet him lustily sure of their welcome. As he picks them up and kisses them he says "where is mother?" They are dear to his heart but she is dearer. After the supper of home made bread and perhaps delicately fried chicken this kindly father says "I will take these youngsters off your hands for a little mother."

Then with the same eager company at his heels he goes to make sure that the stock is properly cared for, looks

through the garden while the children assure him that the peas and beans have grown an inch since morning. Occasionally he goes to the door where the careful mother is "doing" her supper dishes, calling out cheerfully that the garden stuff is extra fine this year or that he never saw the peonies looking so well, perhaps he brings her a spray of yellow roses to deck her glossy hair; then if the day has been an extra busy one for her he will offer to put the babies—he does not call them "kids," to bed. A great frolic this ending up with one of father's delightful stories about when he was a little boy. Later when everything is quiet he sits with the dear mother on the wide veranda, while sleepy birds cuddle their young and great June roses spill incense to the night and he tells her all that may have happened of interest through the day—Does the picture seem like anything you have experienced Captain?" but the Captain has taken off his spectacles and is furtively using his handkerchief.

Perhaps there is a grain of pepper in his eye, he certainly used a great deal on his eggs this morning. "Why—why were you ever there? have I met you before? I do not seem to remember—" No; most certainly not Captain, "but," with a touch of sadness in her tone "I too have memories of such a home. There is a great deal of truth in the picture you drew of the deplorable condition of domestic life in our cities, but I take decided exception to your putting all the blame on the women.

It is perfectly legitimate that they should have ambitions, and do you fancy for a moment that the men of today as a general thing accept their share of the responsibility of homekeeping as my father and yours did? I have another home in my mind in this very city of tin cans, where the father is wont to rush home at night and demand if the dinner is ready, then request that the children be sent upstairs or out of the way as they make him nervous and if his wife timidly inquires whether he will be at home that evening he invariably replies that he will not important business with the board of directors, or he has promised Jones to meet him at the club, etcetera. She knows that the club is a luxury he can ill afford and is inclined to account for his refusal to allow her a new spring suit to his own scarcely necessary indulgences; after a while she begins to wish she could do something for herself, earn a little money that would be her very own. She longs to be less dependant, something more than the laborer who is not regarded worthy of her hire. Then the rift comes in the lute, after a while the music is dumb. No bright intelligent girl is any the worse for the fact that she has business qualifications.

The truth that so many women sustain themselves is proof of their ability. Ask any large firm as to the relative usefulness of the sexes in certain lines of work. If a girl is a good stenographer she will quite likely make a good wife and mother if she is given the opportunity." Miss B's usually pale face was flushed, she did not often discourse at such length to us. The Captain set his coffee cup down carefully and thoughtfully. "Well, well, I confess I never thought of that side of it. I guess I am an old fogey but I really began to be afraid Jack was beginning to ruin his digestion with canned salmon, he actually has the habit, why he ordered it the other day in a restaurant when he might have had something wholesome, but I guess you are right there must be two sides to this question." Miss B laughed as she pushed back her chair. "It's refreshing to find a man open to conviction at least, Captain; but Bertie child we will be late if we do not make haste and Captain I am afraid your hated rival will get an extra fine load of nigs away from you if you do not catch

the next car. Good morning."

Good natured Maggie summed up the occasion to her way of thinking as she and Katie cleared away the breakfast dishes. "Faith, Katie did ye hear the school lady larrupin' it off til the Captain the mornin'? Sure the poor man was that befuddled he put salt to his coffee and drank it off like the best av whiskey. I'm thinkin' he won't know a pig from a short horned calf the day."

A few mornings later the Captain said to Bertie at the breakfast table, "Miss Bertie do you happen to know of a good lady stenographer who wants a position? "Why Captain," replied Bertie, "I thought they had a man operator in your office?" "Yes, we have but he isn't worth his salt and we are thinking of making a change."

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