

"The Brave New York East Side Wife



EAST SIDE MOTHER'S BATHTUB.



WHEN THE SHAKEDOWN BECOMES UNBEARABLE.



HER CURTAINED CHINA CLOSET.



PRETENTIOUS FURNISHINGS SEEN IN TENEMENT RENTING FOR \$8 PER MONTH.



LIVING ROOM IN REAR TENEMENT WHOSE MISTRESS RUNS A FISH CART.

BETWEEN the coal strike, the Ice trust and the beef combine the New York East Side woman is having a hard time of it this summer. She may shrug her shoulders and raise her eyes to heaven, but the coal dealer and the ice peddler are not to be placated. She may cry out against the extortionate prices demanded by the butcher with whom she has traded for years, but he will simply fall back on the meat combine. What can she do?

The East Side housewife is most thoroughly misunderstood and misrepresented of women. She is pictured as living, without a murmur, in squalor and filth—her favorite pastime to gossip and quarrel with her neighbors, or, better still, with her unfortunate janitress—her children physically impoverished because she either cannot or will not prepare food according to the latest hygienic rulings of American cooking clubs—her husband to be commiserated in the possession of a shiftless, slatternly wife. Not being able, as a rule, to speak English, she cannot refute these charges, and only those who come into close, neighborly relations with her can appreciate her true worth. She is at once the joy and the despair of the typical settlement worker of fine theories and high ideals.

In reality, she wages perpetual warfare on the common enemy of all housekeepers—dirt—and under the most exasperating, the most impossible conditions. Her landlord does not set her a shining example of sanitation and cleanliness, nor does he provide for her use the simplest of modern conveniences. Any woman who attempts to keep house in three rooms even in the simplest fashion for her family of six, with perhaps a lodger or two, must either "pick up" continually or take refuge on the fire escape from sheer lack of foot room. Hence she has little time for gossiping or quarreling. For the sake of her children she will herself go hungry if necessary, and in the preparation of dishes peculiar to her race or nationality she could "win out, hands down," against the average head of an American cooking school. And her husband, far from considering her as an obstacle to his progress, regards her as a beacon light, leading him ever onward to a bank account and competency. She it is who carries the family purse, purchases every article in the family wardrobe and deposits the family savings in a bank of her own selection after giving the latter deep and earnest consideration.

Her Vacationless Life.

Summer vacations are luxuries which she cannot afford. Her shoulders are fresh with the burden. In her vocabulary there is no such word as "vacation." The babble of a thousand voices rises, along with fetid odors and heat glare, from the street below. Even had she money to invest in luxuries like screens and awnings, they would

be impossible because they would obstruct the entrance of what little air enters her apartments. The cooking of the meals, a comforting process in winter, now converts her "flat" into a furnace room. The gradual shrinkage in the 5-cent "chunk" of ice has long since converted the ice man into a deadly enemy. And through and over it all hangs the awful fear that her husband may be overcome by the heat in the great factory where he is pressing winter suits and overcoats for twelve terrific, prostrating hours each day. Then he would be taken to the hospital, from which she would be barred by the blue-coated guardians whose language she has not mastered. Yet all this she faces with a dim philosophy that it is a mortal ill to be borne, not combated, and that somehow she and her offspring will survive the torrid wave.

The East Side, as it is popularly known, covers a comparatively small area, somewhat less than half a square mile, wherein is crowded a little city of its own, the Ghetto, with a population of 500,000 souls. Half a million men, women and children, almost exclusively Polish and Russian Jews, crowded into what might be described as four good sized city blocks. That they live and thrive and become decent citizens is the greatest proof of the ability of the East Side wife and mother.

Monetary conditions and a sordid landlord set the limit of her apartment at three rooms. In the modern tenement each of these must have access to an open court or air shaft, but there still stand hundreds of houses erected before the present tenement laws went into effect. In these the best room will overlook the street or court, according as it may be a front or rear tenement. There will be two windows from one of which runs the fire escape. A room ten feet square is considered spacious, and a shallow clothespress in this apartment is regarded by its mistress with proper appreciation akin to gratitude. A door and a window cut through the partition afford "light and air" for the middle room, where the cooking is usually done. Beyond is a still smaller room, so designated merely by courtesy, and here there is neither ventilation nor light—only Stygian darkness.

Stoves as Social Standards.

The average American housewife making her first trip through the East Side is impressed by the almost entire absence of carpets, the pretentiousness of whatever pieces of furniture her East Side sister may possess and the peculiar arrangement of her china closets. The landlord or his representative looks at none of these. The all-important question with him is whether the tenant keeps her stove and copper utensils in good condition. If this be the case, he feels assured that he has secured a thrifty tenant who will meet her rent promptly. Personal neatness apparently counts for little with the real East Sider,

and judgment is never pronounced on a newcomer in the neighborhood until the janitor's wife and perhaps the woman next door have caught a glimpse of her stove and reported its condition to the older residents.

The East Side matron regards the installment house as an institution of the evil one's and buys her furnishings only as she has cash in hand and to spare. In this case she is apt to "plunge" a trifle, buying furniture quite out of proportion to the size and general appearance of her room. If there is only one bed in the house, it will be of white iron, with as much brass ornamentation as her purse will permit. At night this is occupied by the mother and father and during the day it is piled with the bedding used in making "shake-downs" for the other members of the family. This may reach to a height almost on a level with the top rail of the head piece, but once in place it is carefully hidden from view by a lace bed set or a priceless old counterpane brought over by the family as emigrants. A combination sideboard and refrigerator fills the ambitions of the East Side housewife, also a good portion of the room, and a massive pier glass between the two front windows is regarded as an essential. Lace curtains, the more obvious the pattern the better, she does not regard as incompatible with a sanded floor. Draperies of imitation cretonne in vivid colorings give life to the dun-hued surroundings and are retained the year round along with the lace curtains. Bureaus and chiffoniers seem unpopular.

But, however many or meager be such furnishings, the china closet of the genuine East Side woman is a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Each shelf is hung with a pleated curtain of stiffly starched linen, trimmed with home made lace and insertion. Behind these, on the shallow shelves, are ranged two distinct sets of dishes, according to the Moslem law that the animal products, such as meats, gravies, soups made from meat, etc., shall not be eaten from the same dishes as milk, cheese and butter. Separate sets of knives, forks and spoons also are provided and two distinct sets of cooking utensils. In the hand-to-mouth existence she leads, little does the East Side housekeeper know of store room, linen room or pantry, but her china closet is a part of her religion and is guarded with a jealous eye.

Lodgers in Corners.

The thrifty East Sider invariably has a lodger or two who pay 50 cents a week for a "shake-down" on the floor and a peg whereon to hang the suit he wears to the synagogue. He may also arrange with her for his morning coffee and roll at 2 cents or more, according to market prices.

Her day begins early, as the men must be at their shops by 6. For a family of six,

where the daily income is \$2, the breakfast will consist of coffee, bread and butter, with occasionally an egg. Directly after the departure of the men the woman begins tidying up. The "shake-downs" are hung on the fire escape to air if the weather permits. If not, they are piled one on the other on the bed if there is one, or in a corner of the room. The children are prepared for school with watchful care. The Jew regards the education of his children as a profitable investment and sends them to both the public summer schools in the morning and the Hebrew schools in the afternoon. Moreover, the mother will stint herself to provide for at least one member of the family a musical training, paying 25 cents for piano lessons, with the privilege of practicing a certain time each day at the teacher's home.

The children learn early to shop, and that thriftily. There is practically no credit on the East Side and the tradesmen thrive. The Ghetto housewife is clannish, seldom roaming far from Hester street, with its array of push carts, for her trading, which may include anything from a bunch of onions to a new dress. Of the great department stores beyond Broadway she knows nothing. Over the remnants displayed on the Hester street curb she haggles until she wins her point. The unyielding bargain placards of the West Side shops would try her thrifty soul.

Law of No Credit.

She has solved the fuel question partially by purchasing a portable, two-hole gas stove which she mounts on a table or a box. This costs her \$1.50 new, or considerably less if she finds a trustworthy second-hand dealer. She avoids the monthly visit of the gas company's collector by using the slot machine meter. The com-

pany places in her house a slot machine into which she drops a quarter and the gas is turned on at the rate of \$1.05 for 1,000 cubic feet. When she has burned a quarter's worth of gas the flow stops abruptly and is not resumed until a second quarter is dropped in the machine. An ordinarily good manager uses 25 cents worth of gas a week, which is considerably cheaper and infinitely more comfortable than coal at the rate of 10 cents a scuttle, or 35 cents a hundred-pound sack.

Once a week, on Friday, she starts her coal fire to do the baking for her Sabbath day.

Meat is the item of living which strikes dread to the heart of the East Side provider. It must be purchased from a kosher shop, it must be cut from the most expensive portions of the animal, the forequarters and breast, and it must be absolutely above suspicion. No kosher butcher may keep meat more than three days.

The breast of beef sells at 18 cents a pound, the cut known as "chuck" bringing 14. Unkosher meats sell as low as 5 and 6 cents per pound, but the Gentiles living on the East Side patronize the kosher shops largely, to be assured of getting clean, untainted meat. Only the best poultry is offered on the East Side, where it brings from 18 cents to 25 cents a pound. The finest fish goes to the Hester street shops and wagons, commanding from 18 to 30 cents a pound. Pike is regarded as the greatest delicacy. So minutely and thoroughly does the East Sider's religion enter into his domestic life that he eats either the best there is in the market or nothing. Better black bread and coffee than savory meats that are open to suspicion. The housewife may offer but one dish at a meal, but that will be carefully prepared according to the law and traditions.

Vegetables she finds reasonable, fruit high. The latter is eaten, not as a delicacy, a dessert, but to satisfy actual hunger. The East Side child when it gets a penny does not run to the nearest candy shop. The money represents to him actual food and is spent usually at fruit stands. Diminutive baskets of strawberries in season sell for 2 cents, bananas in good condition and of reasonable dimensions can be had for 1 cent, but oranges are practically unknown here during the summer months.

All vegetables are now sold by the pound, as false bottoms in measures and a skillful arrangement of potatoes in reliable measures more than once have nearly caused riots. Potatoes bring 2 cents a pound, beets, an East Side staple, have risen to 7 cents a pound and cabbage is considered cheap at 5 cents a head. Onions, which are used in immense quantities, command 5 cents a pound. Cucumbers sell here for a cent when 5 is demanded uptown.

All this the housewife has not discovered

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