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MY LITERARY COOK.

(Westminster Gazette.)

I am still at a loss to explain to the satisfaction of my self-respect what was the secret of Florence's ascendancy over me. All I know is that, from first to last of her reign in my kitchen, she scored at our every encounter. She was a pleasant-looking young person; although far from obsequious, her manner of receiving my frank confession of inexperience seemed full of servicable sympathy. An intelligent woman this, I made no doubt; but it was not long before I could have wished that she did not show quite so intelligent a relish for my ignorance—it left me so defenceless against her blithe exactions.

'I hardly think,' she remarked, soon after our arrival, 'that you can have noticed the scullery sink when you went over the house.'

We inspected the said sink, and she explained its deficiencies.

'I see,' said I, though in truth it seemed to me very much like other sinks. 'And how could it be improved?'

'Only by being abolished,' she said, with a smile.

The smile and the neat turn of phrase together left me no choice but to have the offending sink replaced with all speed by a new one of the latest and most costly make.

'Of course we shall require a good many cooking utensils,' she observed. I had thought the kitchen pretty well furnished forth, but I asked hopefully what else she wanted.

'I can tell you better in a day or two,' said Florence. And accordingly she presented me before long with a well written list, covering several pages, of articles, some of whose very names I did not know.

'Those,' she said, 'are just the immediate necessities.'

'Surely——' I began to expostulate.

'If I am to do justice to myself and a credit to you,' she added, benignly, with her usual manner of intelligence and refinement, and more than a touch of professional pride.

Every day impressed me more with the sense of her knowledge and my ignorance of kitchen affairs. I felt positively so humbled that I had to keep up my pride by the reflection that, at any rate, there were affairs in life where the tables would be completely turned. But even this consolation was not long-lived.

Florence informed me that she was devoted to reading, so I told her that I hoped she and Louisa (my other servant) would borrow books from the drawing-room.

'Thank you,' said Florence, 'but I hardly think Louisa cares for the same sort of books that you and I care to read.'

I wondered a little of what sort those books were, and offered her the 'The Scarlet Pimpernel.' She replied that she had read it, adding, 'I see it has been staged. I dare say it might make a good play—of the shallower sort.'

After this, perhaps, I ought not to have been surprised that on my taking our new Persian kitten down to the kitchen and introducing him as 'Shagpat,' she would remark: 'Shagpat, is he? Well, we must take care how we shave him then, if we don't want a thwacking.'

'Have you read 'The Shaving of Shadpat?'

I asked.

'Oh, yes,' said she. 'I am a great admirer of Meredith.'

As a democrat I suppose one ought to welcome the taste of reading wherever it appears, but it certainly has its inconveniences.

'Dinner was very late last night,' I said one morning. 'How was that?'

'To tell you the truth,' said Florence, with engaging humility, 'I was so taking up with Mrs. Humphrey Ward's latest that I could hardly tear myself away from it. And you know what it is to be taken up with a book.'

'You have no business to be reading when you ought to be preparing dinner,' I said, feeling that here at any rate it was my duty to assert myself.

Florence, after a pause in which she managed that it should be I rather than she who felt embarrassment, said thoughtfully: 'No. . . . Of course it would suit mistresses better if we were all automatic machines.'

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I was not prepared to discuss our existing domestic system with her; in fact, she was so terribly well educated, always so demure, reasonable even in her impertinence, that I could never feel sure of my right to command her subservience. So, taking her observation in silence, I ignominiously changed the subject, and said:

'I want you to make a raisin-cake to-day.'

'I don't know,' said Florence, 'that I reckon to have time to make your cakes.'

'But I do reckon that you have time.'

'How can you reckon?' she asked. 'There is a great deal of work for a single-handed cook that you know nothing about. But I suppose you would wish your basement to be kept up to the mark.'

'I wish you to make the cake. And if you wish to stay with me you must make it,' I said, I hope more boldly than I felt, and wrote down 'Raisin cake' in the order book, underlining it heavily two or three times.

On the morrow Florence was graciousness itself. I glanced at the order-book and regretted the black lines under 'Raisin cake' as an unladylike 'betise.' We discussed the weather, and she complained that sunshine of late had been only a pale electric gleam. It was very forgiving of her, I felt, to indulge me with such elegant conversation; but nevertheless I cut her short.

'Well, Florence, do you wish to stay in your situation?'

Florence conveyed a shrug by a look and a slight turn of the head—a most disconcerting habit of hers.

'Well,' said she, 'I hardly know. Every situation has its advantages and its drawbacks, and so, I dare say, has every servant. You find me lazy. But, on the other hand, you wouldn't often find a woman who would go out as a single-handed cook who could serve you up a dinner fit to offer to the Prime Minister of England if he came to dine with you.'

Her face glowed with a rapture of professional pride, which sank to the matter of fact again as she concluded. 'At any rate, I have made your raisin-cake.'

She had, indeed! It was, so to speak, a heavily underlined raisin-cake. It was of the size of a top-hat box, of the solidity of cheese and of a richness which would have been creditable in a wedding-cake. Long before I had eaten my way through the portentous cake I had written to a worthy relative, who keeps a sort of mental registry office in her head, to ask if she could find me some quite uniliterary, or even illiterate, young woman as cook.

But it was Florence herself that broke it to me that our style of living was not such as to give her proper practice in her art, and that she must therefore trouble me to look out for another cook. I was glad to be able to reply that I had already begun to do so, and I hope that she was disappointed to see me look not so crushed as she had evidently expected.

But though, perhaps, I for once came off better than she did, I cannot look back with anything but humiliation over our whole intercourse. If I found fault with her as a cook, she no doubt thought me a contemptible failure as a mistress. And the worst of it is that, if we had had to change places, I know that Florence would have approached her ideal of what a woman of leisure should be much more nearly than I could have carried out my ideal of a good cook.

Tetter Cured.

A lady customer of ours had suffered with tetter for two or three years. It got so bad on her hands that she could not attend to her household duties. One box of Chamberlain's Salve cured her. Chamberlain's medicines give splendid satisfaction in this community.—M. H. RODNEY & Co., Almond, Ala. Chamberlain's medicines are for sale by All Dealers.

A Man of the Day.

Cardinal Raphael Merry Del Val, who is not yet forty-two years old, is a most interesting personage, says M. A. P. As Papal Secretary of State and Prefect of the Sacred Palaces he has all the threads of the Vatican administration in his hands—indeed, he is the real power behind the Papal throne. The fact that he is partly English by birth and English by education is perhaps some compensation for the small representation of the English-speaking people in the Sacred College. His father was the former Secretary of the Spanish Embassy in London, and was himself of Irish origin. The future Cardinal was born in Gloucester Place, Portman Square; on his mother's side he is quite English, and his great grand-father was Mr. Wilcox, M. P. for Southampton. He was

educated at a famous Catholic school near Slough, and afterwards at the well-known Ushaw College, near Durham. When a child he always insisted that he wanted to become a tram conductor when he grew up. After taking orders it was his wish to work in the slums with the Jesuits, but the late Pope, who had a very high opinion of him, made for him a career in the diplomatic service of the Vatican. Even so, the Cardinal still manages to do social work in Rome, particularly in establishing clubs for poor boys. It is characteristic of him that when he gave the usual feast on his creation as Cardinal his guests were not his influential friends, but the poor boys of the schools and clubs, which he had founded. He is probably the only Cardinal who is young enough to take regular exercise, and he is an ardent fisherman. He has already introduced shorthand and typewriting into the Vatican, and who can say where that sort of thing will stop?

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Tonight.

If you would enjoy tomorrow take Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets tonight. They produce an agreeable laxative effect, clear the head and cleanse the stomach. Price 25 cents. Samples free at All Dealers.

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'Oh, madam,' said the French maid, 'Fido weel not eat ze bonbons.'

'The dear, intelligent little doggie,' exclaimed Miss Rich. 'There must be something wrong with those bonbons, Cloe. Give them to the children.'

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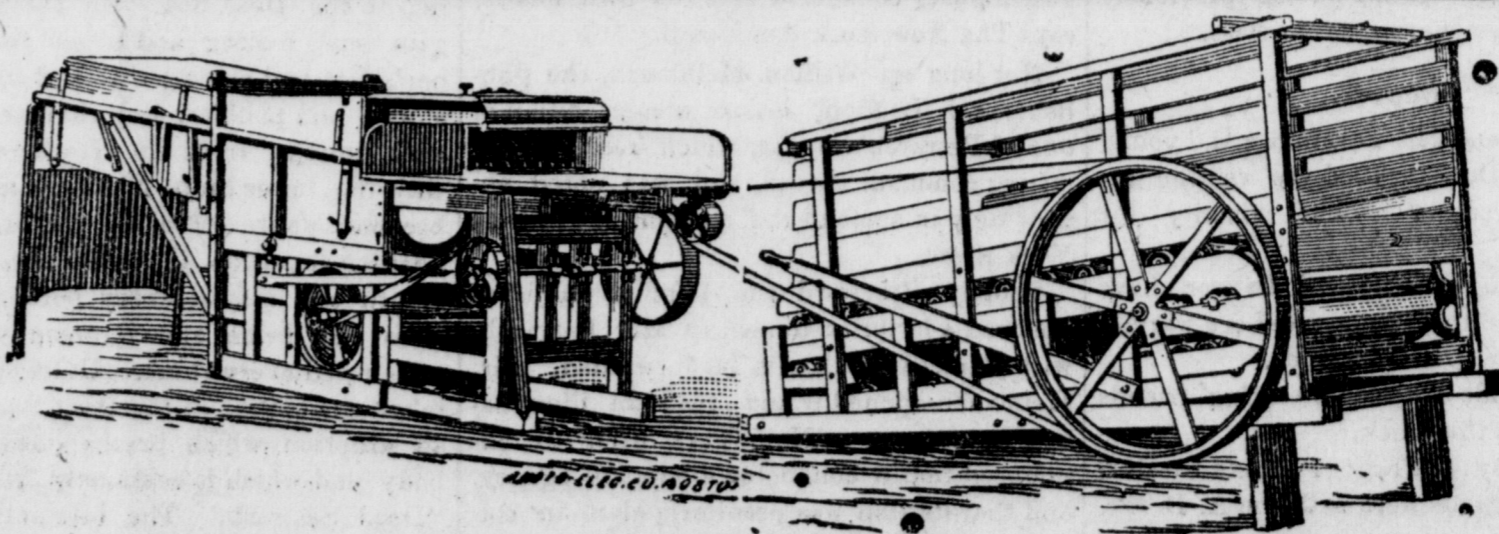
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