

# After Dinner Gossip

AND

## Echoes of the Week

### When Servants Are No More.

Servants are to be as snakes in Ireland. The concentrated effort of some millions of masters and mistresses having failed to mend them, they are to be ended. So says Mrs Perkins Gilman, of New York, where the beautiful future is planned. The reforming lady is probably right in thinking that the grievances of mistress and maid will be settled when domestic service is abolished altogether. We are in future to get our food wholesale from factories—which seems an unnecessary sacrifice to convention in these days of food and drink tabloids—and to have our private houses cleaned scientifically, which is certainly an advance on anything which has been enjoyed up to the present time. The exact method of this scientific cleaning is not explained. Perhaps, on the lines of Christian Science, our houses will be clean if only we think sufficiently hard that they are. "Then," says Mrs Gilman, "for the first time we shall have private homes. Private homes, of course, exist at the present time for those who are exceptionally gifted with imagination. Only unkind people call them lunatic asylums."

But the beautiful vista of domestic peace opened by Mrs Gilman's vision of a servantless age is as nothing to that foreshadowed by her system of professional baby-culture. Incubators for the human race have been known for some time. We are now to go one better, and keep a kind of forcing pit for the tender seedling of mankind. "Forcing" will be done by contract, much to the advantage of the baby, since we are told to believe that "the idea of the mother keeping her child with her is a beautiful myth."

"It is a pathetic thing," said Mrs Gilman, at the end of a recent lecture in England, "that no baby on earth enjoys the society of other babies." This we believe to be true, since without our own knowledge the green-eyed monster jealousy has led more than one callow infant into the crime of attempted murder. Mrs Gilman's apocalypse is fascinating. Still, we are inclined to believe that both Mary Ann and the baby will remain for many years to plague the British home.

### Incomprehensible.

According to a telegram in the papers last week, our friends across the Tasman Sea were under the impression that we had adopted the metric system of weights and measures in this go-ahead little corner of the empire. Sad to relate, they gave us credit for being more up-to-date than we really are. We are so well up with the front rank in so many other matters, that the Cornstalks might readily be pardoned for thinking we had adopted such an obviously desirable system as that in question. It appears that our legislators have placed an act on the statute books giving the authorities power to bring the system into force when deemed advisable. What an opportunity of earning undying fame and gratitude somebody is losing! If any gentleman (capable of judging) could possibly come to the conclusion that the time had not arrived and passed when some reform in our system of weighing and measuring things was necessary, I should like to meet him. How many different kinds of weights and measures are there? I really forget, but have a miserable memory of a disgusting number of pages devoted to tables at the end of that instrument of torture the sun book. It was bad enough to learn them—you will probably remember how you revelled in them yourself—but imagine the unalloyed pleasure of having to use them!

Could any other people in the world—barring, perhaps, the fellahs of Egypt, who to-day till the ground with the same style of plough as their ancestors did when some of the thousand-year-old mummified pussies found in unearthened Sarcophagi used to frisk on the tiles and have infuriated boots thrown at them—cling with such tenacity to a cobwebby, useless, and cumbersome system of weights and measures like that of the British people? The prospect of sweeping away all the present thousand and one ways of getting at the weight of things, and substituting one system, simplicity in itself, is so delightful that sensible people must be very puzzled to know why our enlightened Government has not brought that latent statute into life.

### Clever Women! Are They Unpopular?

A London contemporary devotes a long article on the subject, "Why Clever Women Are Unpopular." As a matter of fact a clever woman is never unpopular, since no really clever woman would ever let the world see or know that she was clever. The women who are unpopular are the women who are so lacking in cleverness that they always want to air their own knowledge. Such a woman may well be regarded as a terrible infliction—as great a bore as a man of the same type. She can never listen to other people because she always wants to show off her own learning. Her conversation is usually a series of verbal fireworks, and she has a mania for turning on intellectual taps labelled Darwin, Carlyle, Emerson or Arnold with a self-consciousness that is positively paralysing in general society. We all know that woman, and the man who flies before her has our heartfelt sympathy.

### Women and Clubs.

Time is forcing proud men to eat his words. The Woman's Club, he said, is doomed to failure. Women are unclubbable beings. They would wrangle among themselves. They would never be able to manage the commissariat, and they would never be able to make it comfortable and convenient as men do. In spite of all the prognostications, clubs for women have gone on and prospered in the most remarkable way, and now we get a quite funny incident from London showing how completely the table is turned. Men are abating so keen an appreciation of the more luxurious of the clubs for women that committees are rising in their wrath and ordaining that the evidence of that appreciation must be kept within bounds. One indignant office-bearer realises that "men for years kept us from setting foot within the sacred precincts of their clubs, but the moment we started such places for ourselves and they found how comfortable and cosy they were, and how well-fed the guests could be, forthwith they crept into the folds, and having got there they show a tiresome disposition to make the most of them. Who is it that occupies the most comfortable chair by the fire? Who best knows the women's clubs that serve the finest wines and have the best-toasted muffins? Is it not man who—?" But the rest can easily be kept to the imagination. An interesting fact is that the men most inclined to take advantage of the comforts of a woman's club are members of "swagger" establishments which still preclude women. The situation is certainly a quaint one, and may well serve as a warning to those in authority over women's clubs in other places than London.

### A Good Story.

If one can insult a man and then make a confirmation of the insult sound like an apology it makes things pleasant for both sides (says "Womenera"). Every one has heard of the famous Parliamentary apology: "I said the hon. member was a liar, and I'm sorry for it." It was rivalled in a certain regiment, the colonel of which is by no means popular. He was absent from mess one night during camp, and as the evening lengthened the diners grew more candid in their criticism, and the colonel was the subject of it. But the colonel heard of it somehow, and, meeting one of the captains next morning, said, with a smile that was three-fourths of a sneer, "Ah, good morning, Captain Candour. I understand you had a most enjoyable evening at the mess last night. A little bird tells me that some of my officers were really eloquent upon a particular theme. What was that theme again—surely I cannot have forgotten it so soon?" The captain saw the whole story had reached the colonel's ear, so thought to smooth it over. "Well, you know how it is, sir," he said; "it was a jolly sort of night, and every one was talking a good deal. You know the old saying, 'In vino veritas.'" Another officer who, like King Gamu, was born sneering, knew that his regiment detested him, and was fool enough to be always harping on the subject. They were on service at the time at some place beginning with "Font" and ending with "dorp." One night, after mess, the colonel and his officers were standing in the open, when the commander said, "Oh, gentlemen, Binks, of the Fifth, has applied to be attached to us. Don't you think some of you who feel strongly on the subject might let him know in confidence what a rotter of a colonel you think you've got." There was a dead silence for a moment, and then a cleverful young subaltern remarked glibly: "Why not let him find out for himself?"

### Unsavory Topics.

"The conversation of even the 'polite society' of those days was very coarse." Probably the gentle reader has also come across this comment in a certain history of the English people. Confess, gentle reader, didn't you feel morally elevated and unconsciously draw your mantle of refinement closer round your classic form? Didn't it give you that same superior feeling that you experience when looking at one of those coarse scenes so vividly depicted by Rowlandson? Of course we take it for granted that we leave those vulgar persons far behind in the search for culture and refinement, but I am afraid we flatter ourselves. To be sure, we would not dream of discussing some subjects which were table talk in the bright days of say a century ago, but there is to-day a most disgusting tendency to talk about the ills that human flesh is heir to in a very frank manner. The more civilisation the more disease (or perhaps it is only more knowledge of complaints about which we were formerly happily ignorant), and people find a wonderful fascination in talking about their complaints from toothache to appendicitis and worse. It is a truly cheerful and inspiring sight to see two decadents condoling with one another, and comparing notes about the state of their livers or some equally attractive parts of the earthly tabernacle. Even in the "best of families" one hears at the dinner table references to health, disease and the state of the "innards," which would be most proper and instructive in a medical work, but at dinner and in mixed company—ugh! The "Lancet" has an interesting comment on this phase of modern society which will bear repeating. "Not only have we heard appendicitis discussed at the dinner table, but even intimate gynaecological complaints," remarks that journal. "It is true that London society is not yet so advanced as is fashionable society in Paris, but it is too true that refinement and that old-fashioned virtue known as reserve have markedly decreased of late years. The arena of feminine dress are exposed to all and sundry in every shop window, to say nothing of the advertisements in fashion papers, and although there is

nothing immoral in underclothing or in conversation about appendicitis or less savoury operations, we cordially agree that such matters are not fitting for ordinary social conversation."

### The Colonial Girl on Afternoon Tea "At Home."

An Australian Girl writes entertainingly in the "Australasian":—"One thing which we 'colonials' cannot get used to in London, and, indeed, even when staying with friends in the sleepy moss-grown country villages, where time surely cannot be a matter of supreme importance, is the strict observance of punctuality at the ceremony of afternoon tea. Really, it gets on our nerves sometimes—if we happen to be in the middle of an exciting set of tennis, or out for a delightful stroll in a dear old English lane—but it is no use kicking against the pricks, or we should certainly have to go without tea. And what thoroughly colonial girl could bear to do that. But, even if she would forego her tea for the sake of an enchanting walk in these glorious woods, it would be considered nothing less than a crime if she did. In the colonies we do pretty much as we like. Our housemaid will bring us or our visitors a cup of tea at any hour, if she happens to like us, or—we run out and put the little brass kettle on the gas-ring, and make it ourselves in less than no time! But, here in England, afternoon tea, though it may be a feast, it is not a movable one. At 5, the clockwork maid brings in hot muffins, hot buttered toast—and sometimes even jam—leek cakes and chocolates, and the hostess makes the tea. The whole paraphernalia is set in front of her on a silver salver, match-box, methylated spirit bottle, hot water in a kettle raised above a spirit stand, tea caddy, and silver teapot. After all the performance, you may have raspberries or strawberries and cream. You can put up with all this 'pothor' if the days are dull and wet, but if you long to be out—as what colonial girl does not—you feel you'd give anything to be allowed, as at home in our 'free' country, to go out and 'just come in at any time.' I heard an only daughter one day not long ago, begging—nay, imploring—her mother (who was going out for the afternoon) to order tea for her at a quarter-past four, as she wanted to go skating at Prince's afterwards. 'I'll not have my house upset,' said the mother; 'tea will be in as usual at five. You can buy tea out of your pocket money if you like; but I'll not alter any arrangements.' They keep seven women-servants, and are three in family!"

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