

for it's all ready?" she came saying an hour before dinner-time, the very first day after my mother left. Even now her desire to be punctual is chiefly evidenced by absurd precipitancy, to the danger of doing everything either to a pulp or a cinder. Yet here she is, and here she is likely to remain, as far as I see, till death, or some other catastrophe, us do part. The reason of it is, that, with all her faults—and they are innumerable—she has some heart; yes, after deducting all that can be laid to the account of a certain cunning perception that she is well off, she has yet a good deal of genuine attachment left; and after setting down the half of her profession to the blarney which is the natural weapon of the weak-witted Celt, there seems yet left in her of the vanishing clan instinct enough to render her a jealous partisan of her master and mistress.

Those who care only for being well served will, of course, feel contemptuous towards any one who would put up with such a woman for a single moment after she could find another; but both I and my husband have a strong preference for living in a family, rather than in a hotel. I know many houses in which the master and mistress are far more like the lodgers on sufferance of their own servants. I have seen a worthy lady go about wringing her hands because she could not get her orders attended to in the emergency of a slight accident, not daring to go down to her own kitchen, as her love prompted, and expedite the ministrations. I am at least mistress in my own house; my servants are, if not yet so much members of the family as I could wish, gradually becoming more so; there is a circulation of common life through the household, rendering us an organization, although as yet perhaps a low one; I am sure of being obeyed, and there are no underhand out-of-door connections. When I go to the houses of my rich relations, and hear what they say concerning their servants, I feel as if they were living over a mine, which might any day be sprung and blow them into a state of utter helplessness; and I return to my house blessed in the knowledge that my little kingdom is my own, and that, although it is not free from internal upheavings and stormy commotions, these are such as to be within the control and restraint of the general family influences; while the blunders of the cook seem such trifles beside the evil customs established in most kitchens of which I know anything, that they are turned even into sources of congratulation at securing her services for ourselves. More than once my husband has insisted on raising her wages on the ground of the endless good he gets in his painting from the merriment her oddities afford him—namely,

the clear insight, which, he asserts, is the invariable consequence. I must in honesty say, however, that I have seen him something else than merry with her behaviour many a time.

But I find the things I have to say so crowd upon me, that I must either proceed to arrange them under heads—which would immediately deprive them of any right to a place in my story—or keep them till they are naturally swept from the bank of my material by the slow wearing of the current of my narrative. I prefer the latter because I think my readers will.

What with one thing and another, this thing to be done and that thing to be avoided, there was nothing more said about the dinner-party until my father came to see us in the month of July. I was to have paid them a visit before then, but things had come in the way of that also, and now my father came commissioned by my mother to arrange for my going the next month.

As soon as I had shown him to his little room I ran down to Percivale.

"Papa is come," I said.

"I am delighted to hear it," he answered, laying down his palette and brushes. "Where is he?"

"Gone up-stairs," I answered. "I wouldn't disturb you till he came down again."

He answered with that world-wide English phrase, so suggestive of a hopeful disposition—"All right!" And with all its grumbling and the *tristesse* which the French consider its chief characteristic, I think my father is right, who says that, more than any other nation, England has been, is, and will be saved by hope. Resuming his implements, my husband added:

"I haven't quite finished my pipe—I will go on till he comes down."

Although he laid it on his pipe, I knew well enough it was just that little bit of paint he wanted to finish, and not the residue of tobacco in the black and red bowl.

"And now we'll have our dinner-party," I said.

I do believe that, for all the nonsense I had talked about returning invitations, the real thing at my heart even then was an impulse towards hospitable entertainment, and the desire to see my husband merry with his friends, under—shall I say it?—the protecting wing of his wife. For, as mother of the family, the wife has to mother her husband also, to consider him as her first-born, and look out for what will not only give him pleasure, but be good for him. And I may just add here, that for a long time my bear has fully given in to this.

"And who are you going to ask?" he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Morley to begin with, and—"

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