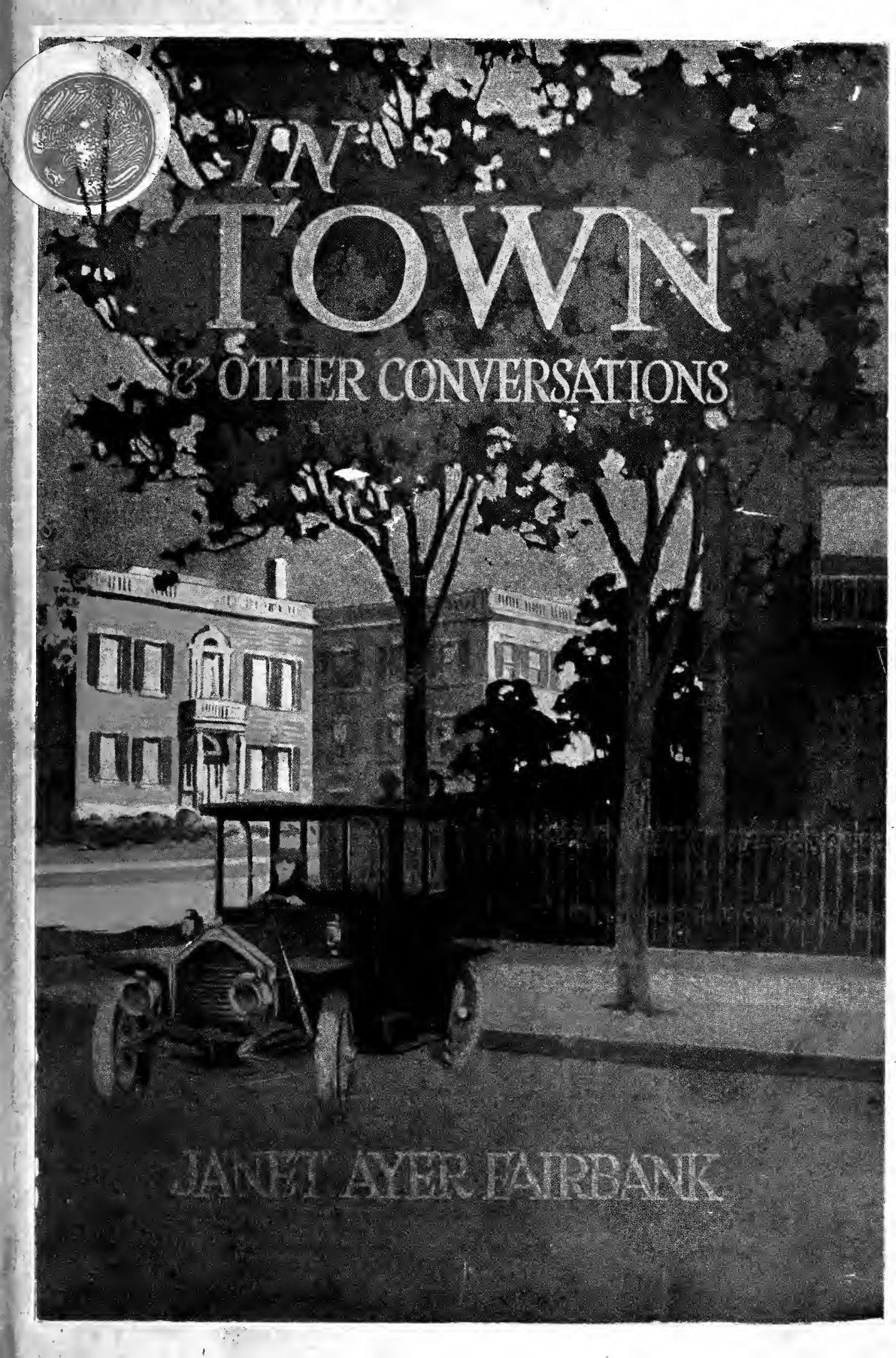

IN
TOWN
& OTHER CONVERSATIONS
JANET AYER FAIRBANK

IN TOWN

AND OTHER CONVERSATIONS

Mrs. Fletcher

IN TOWN

& OTHER CONVERSATIONS

BY

JANET AYER FAIRBANK

PICTURES BY

REBECCA KRUTTSCHNITT

COVER DESIGN BY J. O. SMITH

CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1910

Published November, 1910

These papers are reprinted from the Chicago Record-Herald, *through whose courtesy they are now published in this form.*

The Publishers' Press
Chicago

CONTENTS

IN TOWN

AND OTHER CONVERSATIONS

THE reader is to picture MRS. FLETCHER'S *drawing room. It has white panelled walls, a dark, polished floor, and Adams chairs of gold-colored cane and gaily painted wood, standing at distances suggestive of intimate conversation. One or two charming contemporary French pictures, an elaborate Florentine mirror, antique gilt sconces for the lights, and two remarkably good examples of Chinese porcelain, are the only ornaments to be seen. There are a few books lying about, evidently those of a woman, as they are for the most part of the modern school scorned by the American man. They show a becoming interest in the arts and a tendency, in the poetry and fiction, to intimate analysis that implies a person awakened. The room is restrained and has an effect of discrimination that is to be won only by elimination. One feels that its creator has learned the value, in a crowded life, of surroundings that give an artificial suggestion of deliberation and tranquility. A tea tray*

is placed on a low table near the fire. The service is George the First, gray-toned and squat, and the table is covered with antique fillet lace. Beyond the half-drawn mauve curtains a few indecisive snow flakes drift through the clear gray of a November afternoon.

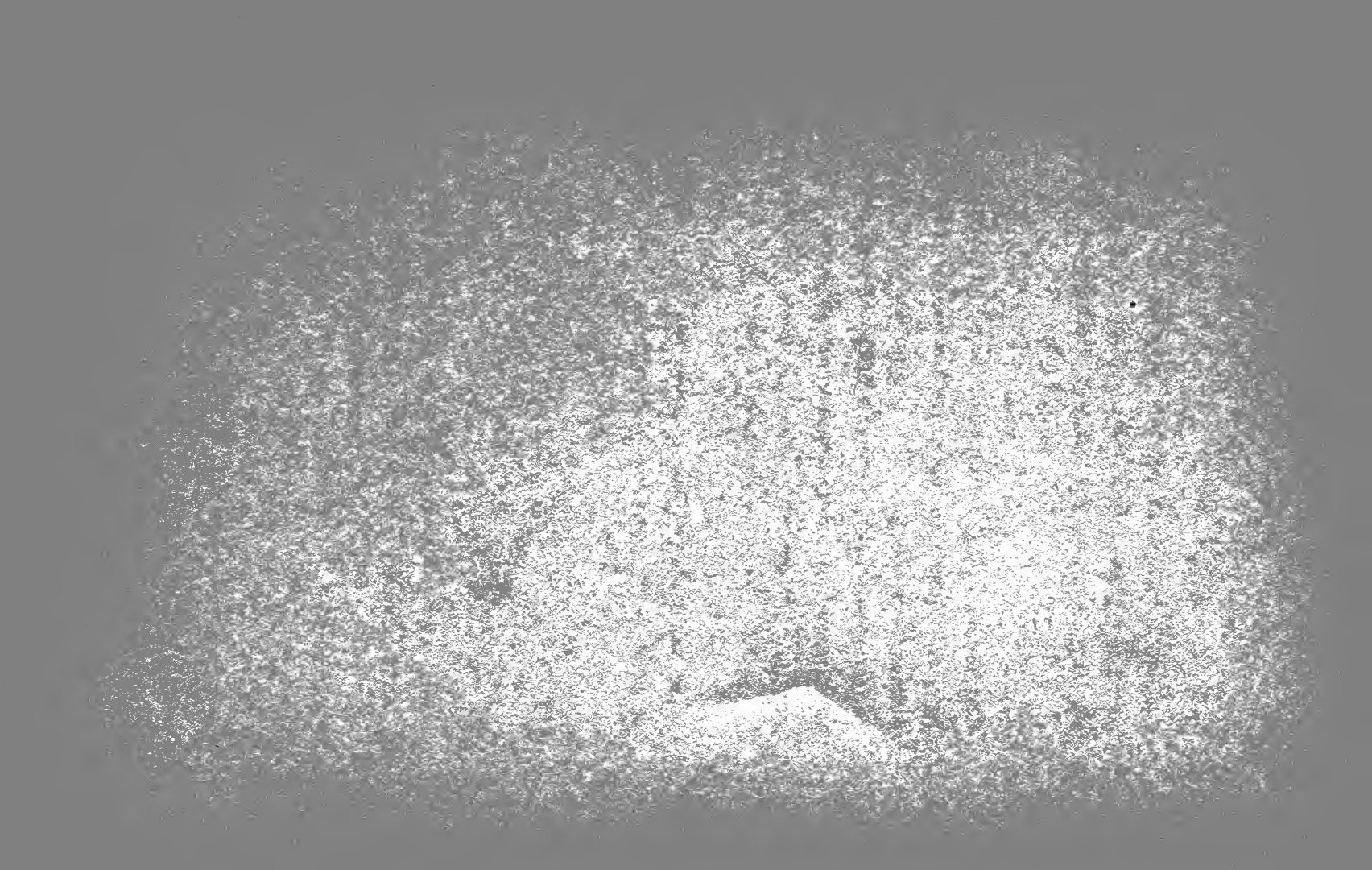
On any late afternoon during the winter season, MRS. FLETCHER *may be found seated before her table, pursuing her vocation of tea-making. She is the sort of woman to whom talk is important and she brings to it the stimulus of an open mind; she has, considering her sex, remarkably few pre-conceived opinions, and she has femininity enough to be careless of consistency. She is the possessor of that fortunate gift of venturesome thought and meticulous action that makes a likable woman. She is a widow and neither radiantly beautiful nor extremely young — but she is quite sufficiently good looking, and is not yet middle-aged, even when viewed from the standpoint of extreme youth.*

With her the reader may often find her mother, MRS. VANE. *She is a comfort loving person, whose hats are as modern as her point of view is archaic. She could never, even in her youthful time of promise, have been anything of an insurgent. Her idea of irreproachable morality is confined to an acceptance of the standards of the generation immediately preceding her own — and, on the other hand, she believes that dangerous demoralization lies in wait for those embracing the ideas of the generation following her. She is a woman who prefers action to thought.*

MR. ALEXANDER *is also a fairly regular partaker of* MRS. FLETCHER'S *hospitality. He is the symbol of the normal man — solid looking, slightly flushed, and self-important, as becomes the junior member of a successful brokerage firm. His aim in life is to impress the innocent bystander with the conviction that he is a master of all there is to know of railroads, the United States Steel Corporation, and other kindred affairs. What he does know about "Big Business" he hides under an air of dark mystery. He is the kind of person one might always put one's finger upon — providing one wished to.*

MR. WEBBER *is another friend of* MRS. FLETCHER'S *who is found before her fire. He is a writer and an intensive man, with a look of painful introspection that betrays one who takes the internal part of life hard. In his endeavors to comprehend fully the unsaid things, he sometimes overshoots his mark, but on the whole his intuition puts him in sympathetic touch with more than his associates would dream of telling him. He has, in other words, the faculty of seeing below surfaces.*

From time to time other acquaintances of MRS. FLETCHER'S *will appear.*



I

IN TOWN

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Holding her sugar tongs poised, and looking inquiringly across her tea table*) Will you have sugar, Mr. Alexander?

ALEXANDER

Yes, two lumps, please. (*He takes cup*)

WEBBER

(*Absentmindedly stirring his tea*) Well, the Winter is upon us again. Are you sorry to be back in town, Mrs. Fletcher?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Thoughtfully*) N-no . . . I am not . . . and yet, before I made up my mind to leave the country, it seemed to me that to begin again upon another crowded season would be unendurable. . . . Those last Autumn days in the open are so precious; you have that consciousness of flying time that enhances every commonplace moment.

MRS. VANE

Well, I am never sorry to leave for the city, when the Fall comes. I don't like to feel chilly, and I don't like to look out of the window and see great swirls of dead

leaves being blown over the lawn; there is something creepy about it. . . . I think one should try to enjoy the country, of course — but it is easier when the flowers are blooming, and the garden is full of vegetables, and when one can wear light, pretty gowns. (*She sips her tea with much contentment, and glances about her*) There is a time for all things.

ALEXANDER

I think the trouble with the country at this time of the year is that a man is always expected to exercise. I don't like to walk in November any more than I do in July, but I never go off for a week-end in the Fall without having something in the way of a pedestrian stunt put up to me, and I'm no natural Weston!

WEBBER

But the country is wonderful in the Autumn, and it does most amazing things to you! . . . In the Spring it draws you out — it makes you feel that you must follow every vagrant impulse — but in the Fall it crystallizes you — it makes you aware of what strength you have in you — you are determined to use yourself. . . . It is difficult to explain.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Nodding with comprehending eyes*) There is no time of the year when one lives so fully — or so consciously. . . . Somehow you take nothing for granted — not even Nature! I think there is no keener pleasure than to walk

through a yellow wood, with a metallic blue sky over you, and crisp, deep leaves under your feet — unless (*reminiscently*) it is to ride out through a cold rose sunset, and home in the clear grey dusk, with nothing but the sound of hoof-beats in your ears, and with the air fresh and stinging in your face!

ALEXANDER

(*Sulkily*) There's nothing in walking in a wood! A wood's a messy place! . . . It's a lot pleasanter to stroll down Michigan Avenue, with people around you instead of trees, and a good cement sidewalk under your feet. . . . As for riding on a horse — I'd rather go out in a motor, any day — it brings you home sooner.

MRS. VANE

I agree with Mr. Alexander. . . . And at this time of the year the shops on Michigan Avenue have such very attractive things in the windows! To-day I saw a lovely hat there — really lovely! — but I didn't dare buy it, because it was a little like the ones we wore last Summer, and I do try to have my hats advanced.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Giving way to the pleasure of self-analysis*) It is strange how different sides of you respond to different suggestions. . . . There is a stimulus in the ordinary, every-day life in a crowd — there is no denying it. . .

WEBBER

Of course there is — we are human, after all. . . . Do you never sit in a crowded railroad train or trolley, and try really to get at the lives of the men and women you see there?

MRS. VANE

(*Speaking strictly from her own experience*) Motors have done so much to relieve crowded trolleys!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Leaning forward in her chair, and eagerly following* WEBBER'S *suggestions*) I know what you mean; it's a curious feeling of sympathy you have, and it's very interesting. You wonder why the comfortably dressed woman across the aisle from you looks so hauntingly unhappy — and why the shabby, ill-nourished girl next her seems so supremely contented with life. One can never be lonely in a crowd, if one only uses one's eyes. Last week on the train I sat behind a little slip of a woman, and a man with a dreadful look of finality about him. He was her husband, evidently, for they didn't talk unless they wanted to — and I watched them, side by side. . . . She smiled at him when he spoke to her, and I hoped she was stupid enough to be satisfied with him — but her eyes above her smile were sad. . . . They have gone out of my life — they never really touched it — and yet I keep remembering the appeal of her look, and wondering if she knows what

"Women always look so very well when they first come back to town in the Autumn"

was so plain to me — that she is being defrauded of her possibilities — and possibilities are the best thing in life, are they not?

ALEXANDER

Probabilities have possibilities beaten a mile! There's nothing in wanting what the chances are you'll never get.

WEBBER

(*Dreamily*) It's a very poignant thing — that curiosity about one's unknown fellow-men.

ALEXANDER

(*Perversely*) I don't see any sense in being curious about anyone you don't know. . . . We all know all the best people — every one who is worth knowing. The woman you saw was probably as happy as she had any right to be — people generally are.

WEBBER

Yes — it's in our own hands, largely.

MRS. VANE

And I don't see that any good comes from speculating about people; I haven't time for it—I'm much too busy. Besides that, it's very seldom that I see anyone worth noticing in a crowd; most people are so badly dressed! (*To Mrs. Fletcher*) There was that woman last Summer

who had that automobile coat that I copied but — (*triumphantly*) — it was a failure, after all — and that just shows!

MRS. FLETCHER

I believe that one of the most wholesome things about being a part of a community is that you find yourself thinking of people all the time; it helps you to understand. . . . In the country you are dependent upon yourself; you must build up your own interests, and, with no one to contradict you, it is very easy to become egotistical and self-important. . . . I think that only a really great person — a genius — could live apart all his life and not deteriorate. . . . The city jars you — and irritates you — and, after a while, it humbles you enough for you to realize that you are not of much importance after all. You see that you are just like all the other good people marching along with you — only very likely you are not accomplishing one-half as much as they are!

MRS. VANE

I think it is impossible for anyone to accomplish more in a day than I do. Now take to-day, for example. (*She counts off on her fingers*) I went to three fittings — to the first meeting of my bridge club — to a luncheon, and to a coming-out tea. No one could do more.

MRS. FLETCHER

A wealth of accomplishment!

ALEXANDER

(*Defiantly*) Well, I like full days — and I like the town — and I like to find it easy to see my friends — and I like to have things going on around me! . . . I like to hear the motors honking — and the whistles on the river — and that murmur, all the time, of things happening.

WEBBER

The growl of the city!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Thoughtfully*) To wake at night, and, instead of the far-reaching quiet, and the stars — to hear always a vague call from thousands of people — and to look up at a sky sullenly glowing with the reflection of the lights they live by — that is something stronger than rural nature — it gives you a sense of kinship. . . . And it is exciting, too, for you feel that there is always something mysterious — there is no way so unknown as the ways among men — and you have a consciousness of something impending, for it is in the cities that anything may happen to you at any time — nothing is too strange; any day spent among men may change the whole trend of your life.

MRS. VANE

(*Complacently*) But, my dear, the lives of people like us don't alter very much; there is that to be thankful for.

MRS. FLETCHER

You never can tell, and that's what makes it interesting. . . . You look out over the city — your own city, that owns you — and there, in the careless throng, your future is hidden away. Something more powerful than you are is waiting there for you, and you know it, and you can't hasten it, nor delay it, no matter how eager or how loath you are.

WEBBER

The country is simply a resting place, there is no doubt of that. It is only where we retire to make ourselves ready for life.

MRS. VANE

I agree with you there, Mr. Webber. The country is so healthful — of course it is very good for the complexion, and all that. I think women always look so very well when they first come back to town in the Autumn.

MRS. FLETCHER

It is in the city that you do your work. It's there you make your friends. It's there you find out whether you have character or not — whether you are a strong person or a weak one. It's a test of us — that's what the town is — a test and an opportunity. . . . Mr. Alexander, do let me fill your cup.

II

SUCCESS

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Who finds it easier to be skeptical than to take another's opinions for granted.*) Mr. Weld, how do you take your tea?

WELD

(*He is a proficient man, who must, even in his cradle, have borne the stamp of achievement; he is the predestined bank or railroad president. He speaks in a voice that has confidential undertones, and with a hurried delivery that does not leave him breathless, as it might a lesser man.*) I don't take it ordinarily. Haven't time. Fix it as you like. (MRS. FLETCHER *tranquilly obeys him*) No — two lumps, please. Thanks. (*He tastes it*) May I have a little hot water? — Thanks.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Sweetly*) I hope that is just exactly as you like it!

WELD

(*Instantly detecting the sarcasm in her tone, but paying it no attention beyond a tolerant smile*) Perfect, thanks. It's my habit to get what I want — as I want it. The

only thing that troubles me is regulating the demand to the supply.

MRS. VANE

(*A feminine creature who instinctively prefers the predatory male.*) It's very annoying when your tea is not as you like it. It is one of the most upsetting things I know.

WEBBER

(*A man whose daily struggle is to make up his mind that what cannot be cured must be endured.*) It is always annoying when things are not as you want them, but what are you going to do about it?

WELD

Change them.

MRS. FLETCHER

May I ask what you would have done if I had not been able to suit your taste in tea?

WELD

(*Promptly, and with a trace of impatience*) Gone to another lady, if I considered it important. (*Having made a business of drinking his tea, he places his cup on the table, with an air of getting one more thing off his hands*) I am a great believer in competition, you know.

ALEXANDER

(*Who regards discomfort as a roaring lion, and who is no Nimrod.*) But Mrs. Fletcher corners the market on tea, Weld. You'll have to admit it.

WELD

In that case I shall be forced to offer inducements.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Glancing up quickly from her task of filling a cup*) Oh, do!

MRS. VANE

Inducements are very interesting, but they are not generally made so publicly, are they, Mr. Weld?

ALEXANDER

(*Suddenly becoming all broker*) Do you think he'd admit it if they weren't?

WELD

On the contrary, I court publicity these days. I find it pays.

MRS. FLETCHER

Nothing is more disarming.

WEBBER

But how would you go about it?

WELD

I should simply be forced to convince Mrs. Fletcher that it was to her interest to supply me.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With lifted eyebrows*) Is that all? And would you allow me to serve anyone else? — Here is your cup, Mr. Webber.

WELD

I should make him pay for it.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Amiably*) I do that, Mr. Weld.

MRS. VANE

(*Hovering undecidedly over the cake*) It is always so interesting to get a business man's ideas about afternoon tea.

WELD

(*Speaking forcefully, as one mounting a familiar hobby*) The business man's idea is the only one that counts in the year 1910, Mrs. Vane.

ALEXANDER

But everybody knows that, Weld.

WEBBER

How about all the wise men who make it a business to

observe and comment? Are their voices lost in the clamor of the market place?

MRS. FLETCHER

And why should the business man be the only one to count?

WELD

(*Bluntly disdaining literary half-tones when discussing a practical topic*) Because it is only the man who is strong enough to succeed who is worth listening to.

MRS. FLETCHER

Ah, but there you have the old question of what is success.

ALEXANDER

(*Startled*) But everyone knows that, Mrs. Fletcher.

WEBBER

Does everyone? — I wonder — What's your idea of it, Alexander?

ALEXANDER

(*Promptly, as one disposing of a simple question*) Why, having more money than you can spend.

MRS. VANE

(*Comfortably*) But I think that is so material, Mr. Alexander. Now I have seen people with enormous incomes — simply enormous — who made a failure when

it came to spending them, and I think that is one of life's tragedies. To be really successful I think you should be able to spend your money as well as make it; you must have perfect taste in clothes — and a feeling for rugs and pictures — and you should be able to tell what kind of china a plate is without looking at the under side. That is my idea of success.

WELD

The purse is an amazingly good educator, Mrs. Vane. Besides, that is not success; that is only attainment.

ALEXANDER

(*Who has been struggling with thought*) I didn't mean that money made success, exactly. I meant that it is getting what you want, and, of course, a man has to pay for that. It comes to the same thing in the long run.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Abstractedly stirring her tea*) Sometimes getting what one wants is failure.

WEBBER

(*Gloomily regarding her*) You make success rather tragic.

WELD

(*Frowning, and evidently endeavoring for the first time to put his impressions on the subject into words, he being*

a man of action rather than of introspection) Well, it isn't money at any rate. Why, a man can inherit that! It's only valuable as a sort of tally. I believe that success is the consciousness of ascendancy, — of — of subdual. It is the sureness of power over other men.

WEBBER

(*Looking at* WELD *with a quick respect*) Yes, — that is expugnation, — of a primitive sort.

WELD

I am a primitive man. I haven't had time for the subtleties. I haven't theorized about getting my ends. I have just gone after them. I may have missed sensations.

ALEXANDER

(*Paying* WELD *the respect due to one who can affect the stock market*) You haven't missed much else!

MRS. FLETCHER

I have an idea that it is only in the beginning, when we are first rising above mediocrity, that we have all the emotions of success. It is like ballooning, — when you once get above the tree tops and the church steeples you have nothing to gauge your speed by; you can't realize how fast you are moving.

MRS. VANE

But it takes so much time to be successful, and I think it is really very commonplace, after all. It means that the best years of a person's life are occupied by something very confining. I hope our next generation will be above it. I have a feeling that if anyone went in for being a failure, he might make a tremendous success out of it!

WEBBER

The last test of greatness is the power of reducing success to its proper place.

WELD

(*Mildly amused at what he takes to be the inactive point of view*) I suppose you hold that the proof of a man's success should be a woman's smile.

MRS. FLETCHER

Don't take away a woman's only function, Mr. Weld. If we can't be in the fight, do at least allow us to crown the victors.

ALEXANDER

It's been my experience that the victors crown you! It was surprising the number of tiaras at the balls last Winter; it seemed as if every man who made a neat turn on the market must have bought one for his wife; and, of course, a woman must be satisfied if her husband is prosperous, and she gets the results.

MRS. FLETCHER

Sometimes results are not as absorbing as they might be, Mr. Alexander.

WEBBER

(*Encouragingly*) But there are plenty of women who are doing things that are worth while — who have full lives.

MRS. VANE

Of course there are! In these days a woman can make quite a career for herself, and of course it's very fashionable to have a career. She has society and her clubs, and Chicago offers so much in music now, and things like that; it always seems to me to be a woman's own fault if she does nothing.

WELD

(*Dogmatically*) Of course, success is simply the willingness to make sacrifices; no great gain was ever made without that; nothing is more ruthless.

ALEXANDER

I can't see the use of arguing about a thing like success. If you have it you know it, — or if you don't, the tax collector will tell you, — and if you haven't it you know that too — or at any rate you'll find it out the first of the month!

MRS. FLETCHER

And I suppose it is like everything else, after all; when you haven't it you long for it, and when you get it I am told you are disappointed. It must be the desire for it that counts. If anyone has any ambition for another cup of tea I will gratify it, and he may testify.

III

THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

MRS. FLETCHER

(*A fortunate possessor of that pleasantly melancholy temperament that does not interfere with a frivolous life. On the contrary, it enhances; one pities her for her pleasures.*) The season is to be a long one this year. (*She sighs*)

MRS. VANE

(*Whose generation is betrayed mainly by her antagonisms; her fresh color and her fashionable clothes making her appear younger than she is.*) It always seems to me to be a great pity when the season is short; it is very unfair to the débutantes. They no sooner come out than they have to go in again.

WEBBER

Like the ground hog, exactly! They see their shadows, poor little things, and run.

MRS. VANE

(*With placid persistence*) I have always thought, myself, that if we must have Lent at all, August and September would be the ideal time for it — when things are so informal, anyway, one wouldn't be particularly inconvenienced by it.

ALEXANDER

But if everything were going right on here in the city, we shouldn't have any excuse for going to Palm Beach — or Egypt — or places like that.

MRS. FLETCHER

And only think how we should hate ourselves if we kept on indefinitely making a tremendous effort to be pleasant to our acquaintances.

WEBBER

With no time left us to be kind to our friends!

MRS. VANE

(*Philosophically*) Well, I've always felt that acquaintances are really better company than friends; they are obliged to be so very amiable all the time, and I've often noticed that friends think their whole obligation is to tell you unpleasant truths about yourself. I have a friend who considers it her duty to tell me when she thinks my gowns are not becoming — and our taste isn't at all the same.

MRS. FLETCHER

No truth that is unpleasant should ever be spoken — at any rate, not to ladies.

ALEXANDER

(*With ponderous cynicism*) They wouldn't believe you if you did, so why not save yourself the trouble?

"Reducing our nerves to powder—for nothing"

MRS. FLETCHER

And truth is rather boring, isn't it? I'm sorry to say that it has not been my experience to find it stranger than fiction.

WEBBER

You forget that fiction has changed so greatly in this generation, Mrs. Fletcher. What with Kipling, and Chambers, it is so much stranger than it once was, that it is asking a great deal of truth to keep up with it.

MRS. VANE

You literary men seem to have given up doing historical novels, Mr. Webber — and that is a great satisfaction to me. It is so very much pleasanter to read about society people than about Bedouins, and Icelanders — and creatures like that. Don't you think so, Mr. Alexander?

ALEXANDER

(*Reasonably, as a man of the world*) Well — of course any man would rather read about his own kind of people — if he's going to read, that is.

WEBBER

Down with Prince Charlie and romance!

MRS. FLETCHER

And up with convention — and the engagement book!

MRS. VANE

(*Doggedly, and at the same time with a faded archness*) You are like me, Mr. Alexander; you prefer people to books. I have always said that they were more enjoyable.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Vaguely*) It depends on both, doesn't it?

ALEXANDER

Well, I will say that when I read I like to feel that the chap who wrote the book was used to going out; you feel that you can respect what he says then — even if he does go in for brains!

MRS. VANE

(*Animatedly*) I am so glad that the time of the year is over when there is nothing to do but read! In the Summer I take all the magazines, always; I don't know what it is about magazines; even if you haven't seen the old ones you never dream of looking at them.

MRS. FLETCHER

They are like our hats, Mother; we feel the same way about them, when new models are in.

MRS. VANE

(*Continuing her line of thought, even in the face of so alluring a branch topic*) But now there will be some-

thing to do all the time! There will be new things at all the theatres — and opera for the whole Winter!

WEBBER

That will not only be a joy to listen to, but it will also furnish a new topic of conversation — and that is a real godsend.

MRS. VANE

What with so many hotels opening now, pretty restaurants, and the opera here for so long, I feel as if I were in another city.

WEBBER

It isn't in the least like Chicago; we are forgetting all about La Salle Street.

ALEXANDER

As long as La Salle Street pays the bills, you can afford to forget it. I have an idea that a new era is coming for Chicago — the era of good food!

WEBBER

That is a great step, I have no doubt — and now that chefs are paid more than university professors, it is easy to predict the effect on the next generation. It only remains for some benevolent millionaire to pension them after their labors are over, to make the profession a temptation to any university graduate.

MRS. FLETCHER

But I am a little weary of always considering the next generation! We hear so much about it all the time, and I will confess that I am aware of a guilty wish to enjoy things for myself, with never a thought of those coming after me.

WEBBER

It is the old feeling for the bird in the hand.

ALEXANDER

Yes — or the bird on the table!

MRS. VANE

I think the opera is a good thing in so many ways. It makes the papers so interesting; I am always late for my morning appointments when it is here, because I feel that whatever else I may skip, the opera is really important. Of course one must know what the women wear; one must keep up with things like that.

ALEXANDER

But, Mrs. Vane, the trouble with the opera is that so many people you don't know go to it — and you don't care what they wear!

MRS. VANE

In the old days one knew everyone in town who had a carriage, and the people who supported the opera all

called each other by their first names — it was very friendly — and (*sentimentally voicing the judgment of her generation*) the opera was better then, too. There has never been a singer to compare with Patti — or with Campanini.

ALEXANDER

Shades of Caruso!

MRS. FLETCHER

Ah, that is retrospect. It's wonderful how it enhances.

WEBBER

That — and the judgment of a generation. We all possess many things that we care nothing for until we see that others value them. Sometimes we make the discovery too late.

MRS. VANE

I like the social side of opera; it's so civilizing.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, it brings us new sensations, and new sensations are worth working for! It enlarges our vision — it spurs our imagination — and it gives us, now and then, in the midst of our conventional lives, an emotional moment. It's things like that — the Art Institute — the University — the Orchestra — that counteract our commercial town and times, and possibly some day — any day — because of

them — some creative person may develop. That is an optimistic idea I like to cling to.

MRS. VANE

(*Harking back to her gaieties*) And there will be dinners, of course — why, there will be something all the time! It is so upsetting to go to bed early; it makes you feel almost like getting up for breakfast!

ALEXANDER

(*With heartfelt sympathy*) And there's something about a long morning that's worse, even, than a short evening!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Dismally*) There will be balls and musicales to go to — and big things like that.

WEBBER

We shall all be feeling very unimportant.

MRS. FLETCHER

Why that?

WEBBER

Crowds are wholesome things; they reduce the individual to insignificance. There is always a danger of becoming smug when one limits one's circle.

MRS. VANE

But I think it is so very difficult to be insignificant nowadays.

MRS. FLETCHER

Nothing else attracts so much attention; it is the last resort of the over-advertised.

MRS. VANE

It seems to me that is the thing most in its favor. It defeats its own ends without any fuss — and a fuss — when one is going out all the time — is so very tiresome.

ALEXANDER

Speaking of going out — all the husbands at my club are looking as if the market had dropped, now that the dances are coming on. It's a discouraging sight for a bachelor!

MRS. VANE

I always think it is very, very, inconsiderate of husbands to allow themselves to look tired. It seems to me that when a woman marries a man the least he can do is to go out with her. But then, I am very old-fashioned.

WEBBER

Is it all worth while, I wonder?

ALEXANDER

(*Puzzled and therefore antagonistic*) What?

WEBBER

This dashing about for four months of the year, and reducing our nerves to powder — for nothing. Why will we do it?

ALEXANDER

(*Staring*) A man must do what's being done!

MRS. VANE

(*Stiffly*) And there is one's position to consider, and what is owing to it.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Absently turning the wick of her lamp*) There's amusement — and the gamble of whether you will get it or not.

IV

CIVILIZATION

ADDISON

(*A recently returned wanderer from over the face of the earth. He has that which, of all instincts, is the most difficult for a city-bred man to understand — the real gypsy love of wandering.*) It is very pleasant to be here again, Mrs. Fletcher.

MRS. FLETCHER

It must seem very dull to you to be settled down — to be doing nothing more exciting than taking tea with ladies.

ALEXANDER

(*He is a distinctly urban person, and is proud of the fact.*) It ought to seem good to you. A man must get such unspeakable food in the queer places you go. Afternoon tea isn't to be despised — may I have some of that delectable looking cake?

WEBBER

Afternoon tea is one of the most rewarding things civilization has given us.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*True to her sex, she has forced her impulses to conform to her way of living, with the result that she sometimes*

voices revolutionary doctrines.) To occupy the time — and at the same time waste it — that is civilization's aim.

ALEXANDER

(*Choosing his cake with the care befitting so serious a task*) I don't call this wasting time — (*He tastes his cake*) — I should say not!

ADDISON

(*Disposing of vocations with all the ease of the unattached person*) Civilization is only fit to run away from. It is the most overrated thing I know; conditions have forced us into it, and we all put as good a face on it as we may.

WEBBER

It is a curious thing that the structure we men and women have built up should be so unnatural. Nothing is more artificial than civilization.

ALEXANDER

Yes — it makes us sit up all night because we can't bear to go to bed — and lie in bed half the day because we can't bear to get up. Not but what there is something in late hours.

MRS. FLETCHER

It gives us comforts, of course — but it has demanded our sensations in payment for them.

WEBBER

Nowadays the sophisticated person knows comfort pretty thoroughly, and has had very little experience of discomfort. I suppose that is the reason primitive life so often seems attractive.

ADDISON

It has a more positive charm than that. Have you no curiosity — you town-protected people — to know what the free life is like? Do you never dream, — while you are looking at swarming buildings — of the long, dim, empty reaches of the forests, or of the wide prairie, with the purple shadows, and no thing in sight all day long except you and your horse? Do you never feel that to win your way to mountain tops is the one thing in all the world that will satisfy you? Have you no desire to know the sea more intimately than you may in a five days' crossing with the dressmakers on the *Mauretania,* — or to drift about unheralded among strange people? Do you never get away from the obligations that pen you in? (*His eye falls on* ALEXANDER, *placidly consuming cake, and he breaks off abruptly*)

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Gently*) Nothing is so alluring as the unknown.

WEBBER

We all know intimately the usual ideal for life.

ALEXANDER

Do we? What is it?

WEBBER

A well dressed person walking unquestioningly along a well beaten path, doing his best to reach the well known goal that every other well spoken of person is trying for.

MRS. FLETCHER

The unthinking following after the unthought!

ADDISON

(*Mounted upon his hobby.*) There is little chance for originality in our city life; it never gives one the opportunity to be alone.

ALEXANDER

Who wants to be alone? I always think the man who goes in for that must be awfully unpopular. I believe his fad is just a form of whistling to keep his courage up.

ADDISON

But it is only when we have learned to be alone that we have learned the true enjoyment to be had in companionship.

MRS. FLETCHER

I fancy that after a season spent in the deep woods, or on the desert, almost any companionship might seem rewarding! (*She sighs*) — It would be worth while trying, if only for that!

WEBBER

The trouble with going off by yourself is that you get to know yourself too intimately. In the ordinary intercourse of city life those depths to which you have accustomed yourself are seldom reached, and you will have put yourself into a frame of mind where surfaces bore you.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Wistfully*) Only a foolish woman allows herself to get into a frame of mind where the kind of life she knows she must lead distresses her. There is one perfectly sure thing about civilization — the unexpected never happens!

WEBBER

But if it did, the civilized person would be wretchedly unprepared.

ALEXANDER

I don't like unexpected things. I like to know what I am up against. I like to be sure that I know where I am.

MRS. FLETCHER

Is there, I wonder, no real charm in uncertainty?

ALEXANDER

(*Doggedly*) Well, I like life to be easy. I like the city, and the things a man does there. I like to go to the theatre, and to ball games, and to be near my clubs, and the automobile agency where I can get new parts for my car.

MRS. FLETCHER

We all make use of the conveniences, Mr. Alexander — they are the great reward civilization offers, but some of us are so unreasonable as to want something in addition.

ALEXANDER

(*Making a sweeping gesture that takes in the appointments of* MRS. FLETCHER'S *room*) Isn't this enough for you?

MRS. FLETCHER

It isn't a question of enough; it is a question of too much; we are smothered in abundance.

WEBBER

(*Doubtfully*) Civilization should mean advantages — we are losing sight of that.

MRS. FLETCHER

It does, of course. It gives the immense advantage of companionship. It is only in the cities that one may choose; in the isolated life one must make friends with whoever happens to be near by.

ALEXANDER

Civilization gives us competition; how many successful men do you know who would be anywhere without that? — And it gives the chance to earn money; — somebody has to pay for the camping outfits!

WEBBER

It offers, too, the opportunity to give a helping hand to those who are not so fortunately placed as we are.

ALEXANDER

(*Gloomily*) That's an opportunity that we are not often allowed to forget. We're always being asked for ice in Summer and coal in Winter — but (*more cheerfully*) there are things that make up. Why, everything we know we learn in the city!

MRS. FLETCHER

Is that so, I wonder? Have our instincts really become atrophied? Are we so benumbed by life that we can learn only in the stimulus of a crowd?

ADDISON

There is nothing more stimulating than feeling — as one does in the wilderness — that one's very existence depends on one's self. The urban person is accustomed to take the essentials for granted, and to rely upon himself for the inessentials only. It is all very well to scorn your meat and drink — try to get them for a while, and see how you feel about them then!

ALEXANDER

(*With a warlike glare over his tea cup*) My idea of civilization isn't scorning meat and drink! My idea of civilization is a good cook.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Fervently expressing the natural reaction of her kind*) I am tired of streets and crowds — and I am tired of finding people everywhere I turn. I should like to try the deep woods — and the silence — and the realities!

ALEXANDER

Realities! — Is a tent any more real than a house? — Is a miserable spindling trout cooked over a smoking camp fire, any more real than a good, well served dinner? — It's all very well to talk about thinking high thoughts in the wilderness; the only time I tried it I was more wretched than ever before in my life! I spent all the morning batting flies, and thinking about lunch, and all the afternoon batting flies and thinking about dinner — and at night I dreamed about buttered toast! That is what the primitive life meant to me. It's my idea of nothing to go in for.

ADDISON

But it is worth the trying, if only to add a zest to one's usual way of living. The drawback to a conventional life is that one day is pretty much like another; the wear comes always in the same place. That is the reason it is hard on the nerves.

MRS. FLETCHER

I think that you have put your finger on the real explanation, Mr. Addison. Just as nature demands a change, we human beings naturally long for what we

haven't. When we are unhappy it does not mean that we are necessarily wrongly placed; our discontent may be quite undivine — and, just as we social people sometimes fancy we should enjoy exile, — I suppose the true recluse deludes himself, now and then, into thinking that what he needs to complete his life is the community.

WEBBER

And behind all that is instinct. I imagine it has led the greater number of us to choose the life that we are, on the whole, the better suited for — the one where we are happier. Of course — there are rebellions.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Looking moodily about her pleasant room, past her comfortable chairs and carefully selected ornaments, to where the door defines the boundaries of her freedom*) Yes — there are rebellions. Will anyone have another cup of tea? — or, if you are tired of tea — you may have coffee. Staying awake all night is a cheap price to pay for a change in your daily habits.

V

YOUNG LOVE

MRS. FLETCHER

(*She is in that fleeting period when she is not too old to recall the giddiness of youth, nor too young to ignore the stabilities of middle age. She is able to look both forward and back.*) Do you take two lumps, Dorothy?

DOROTHY BLACK

(*A fiancée. Anything less obvious than her engagement to marry is suffering a temporary eclipse.*) Y-es, please — (*Doubtfully*) — Harold doesn't want me to take tea in the afternoon; he is afraid it will make me nervous. Do you think I shouldn't?

MRS. VANE

(*A luxury-loving person, whose function seems to be to fill all conversational gaps.*) My dear child, that is just a superstition.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Offering cup*) You should look after Harold. One of the first signs of nervous strain in a man is the fear of it in a woman.

WEBBER

(*Passing toast*) And you will find, as life goes on, that there are many things that are worse for one's nerves than tea!

ALEXANDER

(*On whom the so-called pleasures of life have not yet begun to pall.*) I think the only harm in it is that it ruins your appetite for dinner.

MRS. VANE

(*Solemnly*) And apart from all that, Dorothy, you really should not begin by allowing Harold to dictate to you about what you may do in the afternoon. That is the one time when a woman should be allowed to be independent. Her mornings belong to her cook — and the dressmaker — and people like that — and her evenings to her friends — and her husband, too, of course — but her afternoons are her own!

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Questioningly, but with a dawning pleasure in revolt*) I suppose that is so.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Cheerfully*) Don't worry about Harold, Mother. He will let Dorothy do exactly as she wishes, of course. He isn't a foreigner, or anything like that — he is just a nice American boy — made to be henpecked!

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Protestingly*) Oh, Mrs. Fletcher!

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, of course, my dear — no one will compel you to peck him.

MRS. VANE

(*Stiffly*) I think every husband is the better for some disciplining from his wife.

ALEXANDER

(*Shying off this unpleasant suggestion*) When is the wedding to be, Miss Black?

DOROTHY BLACK

On New Year's day.

MRS. VANE

(*Placidly stirring her tea*) I think the Winter is the very best time to be married; you can have such a lovely trousseau — and the bridesmaid's dresses can be really beautiful.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Ecstatically*) Oh, you should see mine! They are sweet — so white and fluffy.

WEBBER

There's something very touching about a young wedding

party "all white and fluffy." It makes one think of Meredith's poetry on girlhood.

MRS. VANE

(*Shaking a prophetic head*) You young people are so courageous! You go lightly into things that I should hesitate to undertake, at my time of life. . . . Now there is this matter of the bridesmaids' dresses alone; it is a great responsibility to decide on them.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*With the air of one saying the last word*) Well, Madame Marie is making them.

MRS. VANE

(*Eyeing her with increased respect*) Well, my dear! Of course in that case — I must say I like to see a really smart wedding, and pretty girls. So many brides seem to have such curiously plain friends. I always think it would be kinder to them to ask them to sit in the front pew, or something. Bridesmaids should be chosen entirely for their looks, regardless of whether you are attached to them or not.

ALEXANDER

(*Jovially*) Like a chorus!

WEBBER

How about the groom? If his appearance doesn't come

up to this high standard, should he be discarded for some more beautiful youth?

DOROTHY BLACK

No one ever looks at a man at a wedding; what an absurd idea!

ALEXANDER

May I have another cup, please? (*To* DOROTHY BLACK) Where are you going on your wedding trip?

DOROTHY BLACK

Well, we haven't decided yet. You see, Harold thinks that it would be fun to go out to his brother's ranch in Southern California, where we could take riding trips, and things like that. . . . Harold is very fond of camping out, but all the girls I know have gone to New York on their honeymoons, and I can't decide which I would rather do.

MRS. VANE

Oh, my dear — don't go to the wilderness anywhere! You can't tell, yet, whether you will grow tired of Harold or not, and you might be awfully bored; I think that is such an unfortunate way to begin married life.

WEBBER

It's a more usual way to end it.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Kindly*) Don't let them frighten you, Dorothy — I think it might be wonderful at the ranch.

MRS. VANE

(*Persistently*) But the West has had such a bad influence on family life that I shouldn't like the idea of going there on a wedding trip! It would be like tempting Providence.

WEBBER

(*Consolingly*) But if Providence had yielded every time it has been tempted, it would long since have lost its prestige! And at any rate, Mrs. Vane, Southern California isn't South Dakota!

ALEXANDER

New York is full of good shows, Miss Black — and I'll be glad to put Harold up at my clubs there, in case you want to get rid of him.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Hastily*) You are very good, Mr. Alexander — but I think we shall go West. (*As one looking on the bright side*) I have a lovely new riding habit, anyway.

MRS. VANE

I suppose you are busy getting your clothes?

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Fretfully*) Oh, yes, and I am tired out with fittings every day. I have never been so cross in my life — and now I am beginning to have wedding present notes to write.

WEBBER

You will not need tea to make you nervous, Miss Black.

MRS. VANE

Wedding presents already! Do tell us what people have sent you.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Counting off on her fingers*) Well, we have had some silver, and my aunt gave us a Georgian sideboard — and Harold's cousin sent us an Italian dining table — they don't go very well together, but they are lovely apart — and some books — and five sofas —

WEBBER

Five sofas? Your life will be one long loaf!

MRS. VANE

My dear Dorothy, I would take them back and exchange them; I wouldn't hesitate.

DOROTHY BLACK

But we have so much sentiment about our wedding presents, Mrs. Vane.

MRS. VANE

(*Sternly*) Dorothy, I am a very sentimental person! I have made a point of it all my life — but I should never give up to it in an important matter like this. . . . Why, I had a cousin who allowed that feeling to influence her — and she had to take the Welsbach burner out of her kitchen, and use a Tiffany lamp there! She had fourteen given her.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*Sorrowfully*) The kitchen in our apartment is too small for a sofa. . . . Will some one tell me what time it is?

WEBBER

(*Consulting his watch*) Five o'clock.

DOROTHY BLACK

(*In dismay*) Is it really? I must go. I am due now at the apartment to meet Harold and decide on the wall papers. I am afraid if I keep him waiting he will not like the samples I sent up.

ALEXANDER

(*Regretfully putting down his cup*) I'll run you over in my motor, if you like.

DOROTHY BLACK

Oh, thank you so much! Good-bye, Mrs. Vane — I wish you would come in and see my things.

MRS. VANE

I should love to, my dear — but I think I shall just wait until your dresses come home.

DOROTHY BLACK

Good-bye, Mrs. Fletcher.

(DOROTHY BLACK *and* MR. ALEXANDER *go out.*)

MRS. VANE

(*Sighing*) Dear me, getting married is really quite an undertaking, isn't it?

WEBBER

(*Bitterly*) Yes — but I should say that it was more of a commercial than an emotional one.

MRS. FLETCHER

Nonsense! You should have more perception than to judge people by their talk.

WEBBER

But there doesn't seem to be anything else, these days, to judge by.

MRS. FLETCHER

That is true — but I have an idea that just as the things most worth doing are the things we don't do, the things most worth saying are the things we don't say. . . . I have faith in young love. . . .

VI

DÉBUTANTES

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Who has an henotic effect on age and youth.*) I suppose you unattached young men are interested, these days, in the débutantes?

WEBBER

(*With the aghast look of a man who makes it a pose to prefer experienced women*) They are upon us again, are they not?

ALEXANDER

(*Regretfully*) Well, I doubt it. . . . We are too old for them. They like us under twenty-five; it will be years before they get to us — and then it will be only the remnants.

HARSTON

(*A young man of the useful dancing type; at a glance he suggests the ball room.*) There are a lot of first-rate girls coming out this winter.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Cheerfully*) There always are! It's the one crop that never fails us, no matter what the season may be like.

ALEXANDER

(*Ruefully*) The worst thing about the débutantes is that they make a man feel so old! I don't like being treated with respect by fluttering young things! I'd rather they would practise their arts on me.

MRS. FLETCHER

But they don't need practising; their arts are instinctive.

HARSTON

(*Reminiscently*) I don't know about that, Mrs. Fletcher.

WEBBER

Nor I. . . . My idea of instinctive things is that it takes a certain amount of living to bring them out. . . . Extreme youth endeavors to be as nearly like everyone else as possible; instincts make for peculiarities, and they haven't a chance until the young person has lived long enough not to be afraid of being individual.

MRS. FLETCHER

The modern sophisticated person plans all her impulses, I will grant you. — I am very tired of carefully consistent instincts, for while they may be more interesting they are not exciting. . . . I like the feeling that almost anything may happen to young people — and I like the gaiety of youth.

WEBBER

But the gaiety of youth so often means the vacuity of middle age!

HARSTON

There's nothing the matter with the way débutantes look; they are so pretty and so fresh.

MRS. FLETCHER

And they have such delightful, tremulous manners, and such clear, wide eyes!

WEBBER

Unfortunately a clear eye does not always mean a clear mind.

ALEXANDER

No — nor the reverse. . . . It's too bad — but brains are not becoming.

MRS. FLETCHER

The compensation is that it isn't necessary for them to be. . . . Only a lovely woman can afford to be without them. It is idle to talk of beauty going and leaving brains behind. If that were always so, age would never be a tragedy, even to the most beautiful. . . . Middle age is simply youth grown commonplace.

ALEXANDER

But I don't find débutantes empty-headed, in these days

of college education for the frivolous! The trouble with most of 'em is that they are young enough to know less.

WEBBER

There is a lot of sentimental nonsense talked about youth. It is simply unripe age. . . . It is difficult to take it and have it agree with you.

MRS. FLETCHER

But agreement is so stultifying!

HARSTON

(*Harking back, and voicing the belief that is in him*) Every normal bachelor is interested in débutantes.

ALEXANDER

Is it your idea that the eligible bachelor is the normal one?

MRS. FLETCHER

No indeed; he is as unusual as the dodo. All the eligible bachelors are married!

ALEXANDER

(*Speaking from the heart*) Because I should say that whether he is interested in the débutantes or not, their mothers are interested in him.

MRS. FLETCHER

But no débutante should be held responsible for her mother! That is hitching the cart before the horse. (*Enter* MRS. MATER. *She is a typical American mother. Having married young, she has still sufficient youth left to equip a less self-effacing woman, but she gladly lavishes this, together with everything else, upon her daughter. Her clothes are obviously last season's.*)

MRS. MATER

How do you do, Mrs. Fletcher? (*She glances smilingly from* MR. WEBBER *to* MR. HARSTON, *and last, lingeringly, at* MR. ALEXANDER) And how many men you have here to-day! I wish Daisy had come with me. . . . She is making another call — but she is coming here after me, so it will be all right, after all. The dear child is so particular about her calls! She appreciates so much the kind things people do for her. Now to-day she has gone to see Mrs. Hawley — she gave a lovely dinner and theatre party for Daisy — you know Daisy's father and Mr. Hawley used to be partners — and I think theatre parties are really the ideal way of entertaining young people; there is so much of the time when they don't have to say anything at all, and between the acts they can talk about the play — sometimes, that is, . . . I always tell Daisy to be careful. When she is out, and I am sitting at home, I can't help wondering if she is talking. . . . The other night I

woke her father out of a sound sleep to ask him if he thought she would have anything to say to her cotillon partner — some cotillons are so long, you know — but he didn't comfort me at all; he just reminded me that he had a case to try the next day, and after that he wouldn't say another word — and I couldn't help thinking that perhaps Daisy might have inherited it from him. . . . Of course, it doesn't make so much difference if a man doesn't talk — a married man — that is —

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Dextrously stemming the tide*) Tea, Mrs. Mater?

MRS. MATER

Yes, thank you — I'll have it as strong as you can make it, because to-night is the Assembly Ball, and I shall have to sit up until all hours to hear if Daisy had a good time or not —

WEBBER

You don't mean to say that you wait up for her every night?

MRS. MATER

Why, Mr. Webber! — What's a mother *for?* I couldn't possibly go to bed without seeing how many favors Daisy had — and hearing who took her in to supper. . . . I believe in being very particular about things like that — very — and besides, I want to know.

ALEXANDER

(*Conventionally*) I am sure Miss Mater keeps you busy.

" It's the one crop that never fails us "

MRS. MATER

(*Archly*) I shall tell Daisy you said that, Mr. Alexander! Daisy is so afraid of you. She said, only yesterday — I just happened to be talking about you —"Why Mother, Mr. Alexander must be thirty-five years old!" — but she likes your motor, Mr. Alexander, she's often noticed it.

HARSTON

(*With bitterness*) A man has to be thirty-five to accomplish that.

MRS. MATER

And that reminds me, Mr. Harston, you must not take Daisy on such long walks! Last Sunday when she went out with you she missed four callers, and I think it is very important for a girl to be seen in her home her first season — there's nothing more important — except going out, of course —

(DAISY MATER *comes into the room. She has always been so perfectly dressed that up to the time she was nineteen years old nothing more has been asked of her.*)

MRS. FLETCHER

How do you do, Daisy? Your mother has just been talking about you.

DAISY MATER

(*Disposing of her parent with all young America's easy scorn*) Oh, Mother! — I'd have come with her, Mrs.

Fletcher — only she made me go and call on that Mrs. Hawley. Mother's a perfect old fuss about calls! I am sure no one wants to see me — and I know I don't want to see them — but she makes me go out on a round of them every day. (*She subsides into intimate conversation, and much laughter, with* Mr. Harston)

MRS. MATER

(*Eyeing her daughter with the mingling of pride and dissatisfaction that nowadays seems to express the maternal instinct*) I am afraid we must go; Daisy will be late for the hair-dresser if we don't hurry. . . . I had no idea it was so late — I don't suppose you are going our way, Mr. Alexander?

ALEXANDER

(*Nobly placing an untouched English muffin on his plate, and his plate on the table*) Do let me take you home, Mrs. Mater.

MRS. MATER

(*Rising with alacrity*) How very good of you! How did you happen to think of it? I should never have dreamed of such a thing! — Daisy, Mr. Alexander is going to take us home in his motor; I've been telling him you liked it.

DAISY MATER

(*Carelessly, her attention still with the ineligible dancing man*) You go with him, Mother — I'm going to walk home with Mr. Harston.

MRS. MATER

(*Feebly*) Oh, Daisy! I wish you would come with me.

DAISY

(*Shortly*) Well, I'm not coming — that's all. Imagine riding in a motor this lovely day! I'll be home before long. You can make the hair-dresser wait — but you had better hurry, or you'll miss him.

MRS. MATER

Daisy is right, Mrs. Fletcher — I must go. Come, Mr. Alexander. . . . You'll all come to our tea next week, won't you? (MRS. MATER *and* MR. ALEXANDER *depart, casting regretful backward looks at the little group by the fire*)

VII

THE AMERICAN HUSBAND

MRS. FLETCHER

(*A widow, who is not too young to be sympathetic, nor too old to be provocative.*) I understand that Mr. John Corbin has written a play in vindication of the American husband. Doesn't that seem almost too easy a task for a strictly up-to-date playwright who has had all the advantages of association with the New Theatre? It must have been a great education to have read all the plays which were refused, and he really should have done better.

WEBBER

(*An optimist where women are concerned.*) He's probably intending to write a trilogy, beginning with the husband, working up through the children, and finally, when he has learned all that he can from the others, he will finish with a spirited plea for the American wife.

ALEXANDER

There's nothing he can learn from the American husband that will help him understand the American wife.

MRS. VANE

(*Dispassionately dipping in a conversational oar*) Well, I think the untrained American husband has many failings. He is often a great trial. He *will* spend all his time in his office — not that we women would know what to do with him if he didn't — and he *won't* travel. Of course, I will say for him that he works so hard that he often dies young — and Europe is full of American widows.

ALEXANDER

(*Who fancies that whatever he may be ignorant of, he knows the value of money. He does not realize that he overestimates, or, in fact, that with such a subject, such a thing could happen*) They are left with possibilities of letters of credit — you'll have to admit that.

MRS. FLETCHER

Yes, and his wife has seen so little of him during his life that she can't be expected to miss him very poignantly after his death.

WEBBER

The modern couple must be inured to separation. I wonder if the assurance that there are no partings in Heaven appeals to the average benedict?

ALEXANDER

(*With heavy pleasantry*) There's one thing that balances it, at any rate; there are no tickers in the other place

— and while a man can live without his wife if he can follow the stock market, when he loses that he must have some excitement.

MRS. VANE

(*Dreamily*) And a woman must have something at hand to lose her patience over. Husbands are really very convenient for that.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder if the more devoted couples are most linked by the things they *do* agree upon or the things they *don't*?

ALEXANDER

By the things they don't, of course. There's nothing so intimate as a good fuss, and there's no one so necessary to a chap as the man he isn't afraid of having around when he loses his temper. Having a wife must be like having a punching bag; a man can work up all his arguments on her in private, and then stun some fellow at his club with 'em. I've often envied the married men when I've heard 'em holding forth.

MRS. VANE

But I think the reason married men talk so much when they are away is that they have so little opportunity when they are at home.

MRS. FLETCHER

It is work or be worked, apparently. In that way, mat-

rimony isn't so different from any other combination of people. The unfortunate thing about it is that our men find it is less trouble to allow us women to take an unfair advantage; that is modern chivalry.

MRS. VANE

(*Her sex loyalty aroused*) Well, I don't believe in sympathizing with men. I think it is a very bad thing for the American husband to be pitied; the first thing you know he'll get it into his head that he is ill used, and then what should we do? He likes to indulge us. It isn't that he is unselfish — he does what he wants to, just as anyone does. He works because he likes work, just as women play because they like play. (*She settles herself comfortably in her chair and drinks her tea with the righteous air of one who has delivered her mind*)

MRS. FLETCHER

Some women play because they haven't the temperament to be idle — and because the men have left them nothing to do.

WEBBER

Those are the women to whom play is dangerous.

ALEXANDER

(*Simply voicing the belief that is in him*) Of course, if

a man cares anything about his wife he wants her to be free from any kind of bother.

WEBBER

(*Thoughtfully*) Possibly that sort of husband is robbing his wife of her birthright.

MRS. VANE

Well, I am sure, Mr. Webber, that any woman likes to be spared trouble.

WEBBER

It is that point of view that the foreign-born object to. They consider it unsettling, and a bad influence.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, if I were an Englishman and accustomed to being king in my own castle, I shouldn't encourage any intimacy between my wife and one of our untrammeled countrywomen; she might open the eyes of even the most painstakingly blinded.

ALEXANDER

That's all very well, but the foreigner wants to remember that the very qualities he talks against in a husband, are the ones he finds most convenient in a father-in-law. He likes him to be open-handed.

MRS. VANE

And of course only a very foolish woman expects a for-

"A woman must have something at hand to lose her patience over"

eigner to give up doing what he wants to in order to please her; she should know perfectly well that he won't, and she doesn't marry him for that, anyway. With the sort of husband she has been brought up on, she naturally expects her rights.

MRS. FLETCHER

The only fortunate thing is that *her* rights seem so often to be *his* wrongs.

WEBBER

The cultivated American woman is a model we all acclaim, just at present. We feel that nothing is too good for her, and — (*he carefully abstains from looking at* MRS. FLETCHER) — I fancy that nothing is.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am not so sure. I have a feeling that the cultivated American woman is greatly overrated. She is made much of for thinking the same thoughts — arriving at the same conclusions — that we take for granted in a man.

MRS. VANE

(*To whom externals are more than skin deep.*) But, my dear, I think it is very much to a woman's credit if she thinks at all — a pretty woman, that is. In my young days only the plain and dowdy ones ever attempted such a thing, and of course, nobody cared whether they did or not! (*She bridles with the unmistakable complacency of the woman who has — or has once had — good looks*)

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, customs change, but human nature remains surprisingly the same. One must be either well dressed or well educated, even in these enlightened days; there is no middle path. . . . But when it is a question of a woman's choosing which of the two to follow, it really seems as though the one were as rewarding as the other.

ALEXANDER

I have a theory that good clothes help a woman to marry.

WEBBER

If that is so, education helps her to make matrimony a success.

ALEXANDER

The success of matrimony seems to me to depend on how much of an income the husband can earn. If the American man, in any walk of life, can't manage to give the American woman more than she should reasonably expect, he'd better leave marrying to the bank presidents.

MRS. FLETCHER

The only trouble with the bank presidents is that there are so few of them. The supply isn't nearly equal to the demand.

MRS. VANE

It sometimes seems that the only men with futures are those with pasts — financial pasts, I mean — and opulent

futures. It is really a very difficult matter to decide which of the nice boys you see about, is going to become successful enough to give a girl all the things that she is going to want, these days. And, of course, a mother naturally wishes her daughter to have everything that everyone else has.

WEBBER

(*Acrimoniously, with a thought to his own slender purse*) Yes, indeed. What use else is being an American? Unlimited aspirations for unnecessary possessions has become our most evident hall-mark!

ALEXANDER

A man doesn't care so much about possessions — as a rule. Of course, he likes to have money enough to buy a motor, and feel free to take an afternoon off for a baseball game now and then, and for bridge at the club; but most of the things he wants are for his family.

MRS. FLETCHER

The American husband is an everlasting marvel to me in the complete unselfishness of his providing. There isn't another breed in the world that so generously pours all the reward of its labor into the incompetent hands of untrained women to spend.

MRS. VANE

(*Impatiently*) But, my dear, the American man doesn't know how to spend money; he can only earn it.

ALEXANDER

It's another case of "hang your clothes on a hickory limb, but don't go near the water," when you learn how to swim, isn't it? I don't see how a man is ever going to learn how to spend, when it is all taken out of his hands.

MRS. VANE

(*Easily*) Oh, well, he has no taste anyway.

WEBBER

I'll have to admit that the average American is not much of an aesthete.

MRS. VANE

He is so very inferior to his wife, isn't he? I often wonder that there are not even more divorces than there are, when you think of all the very delightful women who are thrown away on stupid business men.

MRS. FLETCHER

We have all of us read Ibsen and modern English fiction — that is true, Mother — but very few of us have ever done anything with the cultivation we are so complacent about. I must say that I am enough of an American to respect the person who gets results, no matter if he is rather boring at dinner. Half the time he is tired, poor dear!

WEBBER

You don't, then, approve of the modern home where the

Engineering Magazine is lost to sight, and the English Review is flaunted?

ALEXANDER

It makes no difference whether she approves of it or not, it is the modern American home. Our generation has developed it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, I may be either old-fashioned or very advanced; it's either early Victorian or late Georgian; but I have a great admiration for the man who does, and none at all for the woman who — doesn't.

WEBBER

But don't you believe that the woman of the future will be fully as useful a member of society as her husband?

MRS. FLETCHER

I doubt it. She will be so proud of being able to work that she won't get much done. And, besides that, I find the equipped woman is often tiresome. One of the best things about an education for men is that it teaches them to treat serious subjects lightly; and one of the worst things about an education for women is that it teaches them to treat light subjects seriously. When, as a sex, we are really as well prepared for achievement as you men are — there will be no enduring us. The much-abused American husband will be a well-spring of wit compared to us.

VIII

WOMAN AND SUPERWOMAN

MRS. FLETCHER

(*A woman who appreciates the value of feminine avocations.*) Have you had a busy day, Miss Bane?

MISS BANE

(Miss E. Lindley Bane *is the kind of person one hears spoken of as "energetic." She is a college graduate, a business woman, a suffragist, and a believer in the ability of her sex. She is mildly amused*) Oh, I am always busy. To-day from twelve to two I was speaking at the Noonday Club, and I couldn't eat.

ALEXANDER

(*With increased deference*) I say, it's awfully good of you to lose your lunch talking to working girls.

OPDYKE

(*He is a collector of beautiful things, a person of exquisite tastes, shrinking sensitiveness, and frail physique. He is to be counted upon to be better at intuitions than at baseball, and he wears clothes that would make the most extreme "hobble" skirt seem a conservative garment*) Yes,

indeed; it must be wonderful to bring beauty into their lives — to teach them what the gentle life means.

MISS BANE

(*Placing her cup on the table and suddenly shooting her manly white cuffs from her severe coat sleeves*) I wasn't trying to teach them about the gentle life; I don't know anything of it; it would bore me to death — I was trying to make insurgents of them, but it's hard to insurge on six dollars a week!

MRS. FLETCHER

What did you speak to them about?

MISS BANE

The vote. I put it to them that they couldn't expect to better their condition unless they succeeded in getting the franchise.

OPDYKE

But the polls are sometimes so rough, Miss Bane. I couldn't bear to think of a lady subjecting herself to the ordeal of going to them. And when I recall some of the places where political meetings are held — (*he breaks off, shudderingly, as one who would continue were it not for the presence of the weaker sex*)

MRS. FLETCHER

But I thought that the modern woman might go anywhere, and say anything.

ALEXANDER

(*With easy assurance*) She can go anywhere the men will let her go, and say anything they like to hear, just as always.

OPDYKE

I don't agree with you, Alexander. No woman — no lady, that is — would think of consulting a man to see how far she might go. There's such a thing in the world as feminine instinct, I should hope.

MISS BANE

(*Cruelly*) If there is, it is not in the feminine sex — at any rate, not under thirty-five. The modern woman — (*decidedly*) — has no time for femininity.

MRS. FLETCHER

That is a dangerous boast. If her femininity should suddenly surprise her, how wretchedly unprepared she would be.

ALEXANDER

(*Comfortably*) Every woman is feminine enough when she comes to recognize her master.

OPDYKE

Good heavens, Alexander! What a responsibility you would thrust upon men! Imagine being the master of the modern woman! How very uncomfortable one would be.

MRS. FLETCHER

It would be like an amateur trying to control an aeroplane.

MISS BANE

(*Carelessly, her mind on the selection of a cake*) My dear Mrs. Fletcher, how much importance you give him. It would be like the tail trying to soar above the kite.

ALEXANDER

(*With the huffiness of the conventional man in the face of belittlement*) It's all very well to talk like that, but where would you women be without us men, I'd like to know? Where would you get the money to live on?

MISS BANE

(*Lightly, as one discussing a subject too elementary to seriously engross the really executive woman*) Why, we should earn it, of course.

ALEXANDER

(*Truculently*) Ever tried it?

MISS BANE

Tried what?

ALEXANDER

Supporting yourself.

MISS BANE

(*Amused*) Why, I've been out of college for six years.

MRS. FLETCHER

And you have been making money ever since then?

MISS BANE

Of course. Just because my father happens to be a railroad president is no reason why I shouldn't have the fun of working. The first year, when I was studying stenography and double entry, I had some help from him, but after that I had no trouble at all.

OPDYKE

Dear me! It is always a surprise to a man to see what a really clever woman can accomplish.

MISS BANE

I've taken a year as a stenographer, so that I might understand business, and I've established a tea room that is a real money-maker, and I've served my turn as factory inspector, and I've worked in a sweat-shop and written it up; and in a department store, for the same reason. And, of course, all the time I've been publishing articles on the conditions of the working woman.

ALEXANDER

(*Disagreeably*) I find the condition of the idle woman so much more interesting.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Sighing with the becoming satisfaction of inexperience*) But sometimes I think she is worse off than her driven sisters.

OPDYKE

You women are so energetic. I wonder at you. (*Hopefully introducing an aesthetic topic*) To-day while Miss Bane was speaking to those working girls I was poking about the shops, and I found the most lovely piece of old fillet lace. If you had picked it up in the rag market at Venice, Mrs. Fletcher, you would have considered yourself fortunate. It is very beautiful, and really old.

MISS BANE

(*Putting aesthetics in its place*) It was made under the most atrocious conditions, I have no doubt.

OPDYKE

(*Appealingly*) But we don't want to think how beautiful things are made, do we, Miss Bane? It is enough for them to exist.

MISS BANE

(*Incisively*) The more one knows about conditions, the less one cares for what they produce.

OPDYKE

(*Wistfully*) How cynical you women are!

MISS BANE

Cynicism is the payment for clear-sightedness. The sentimentalist is only a person who habitually looks at the world through rose-colored spectacles.

MRS. FLETCHER

But rose-color has its use, Miss Bane. There is no dawn without it.

ALEXANDER

And it's a becoming light; without it matrimony would fall off, you'd find.

MISS BANE

Oh, it has its sentimental uses, of course.

OPDYKE

And sentiment is so necessary, isn't it?

MISS BANE

You men seem to find it so. Now I am unable to see why a marriage can't be a perfectly reasonable affair. Other people's experiences have shown us that that is the sensible way to look at it.

MRS. FLETCHER

But, Miss Bane, other people's experiences, however interesting they may be, have nothing to do with our own. They teach us what has happened — never what may. Only time can do that.

MISS BANE

Well, I don't agree with you. I think, as a sex, Mrs. Fletcher, we all demand too much. You hear women saying that they want husbands who will sympathize with them, and understand their work, and help them to their careers. Now I think that is all nonsense. Why should we be so unreasonable as to expect it? We know what men are. If a man has enough interests of his own to keep him contented and occupied, that is all we should ask.

ALEXANDER

(*Glowering*) So you wouldn't expect him to be the housekeeper?

MISS BANE

(*Glancing pointedly from Alexander to Opdyke*) Well, possibly in another generation —— I must be off, Mrs. Fletcher.

OPDYKE

(*Eagerly*) Do let me go with you. I love to hear about your work, and I am sure you must find me an inspiring listener. And I should like to show you that piece of lace; I want to convince you that some things justify any conditions. Good-bye, Mrs. Fletcher.

MRS. FLETCHER

Good-bye. (*Mischievously*) Take good care of Miss

Bane, won't you, Mr. Opdyke? (Miss Bane *and* Mr. Opdyke *go out amid general laughter.*)

ALEXANDER

(*Fuming*) What's the matter with this generation, I'd like to know?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Soothingly*) Oh, let us have our simple causes, Mr. Alexander. Underneath all this talk about equality of the sexes is human nature, and sooner or later that is apt to make us toe the line.

ALEXANDER

And a good thing, too.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder?

IX

CHILDREN

The reader is asked to picture a living room that shows signs of having lived. The couch is spiritless, and the cushions have lost their freshness. The tables are laden with photographs of children in various stages of their development, and the piano is littered with the impedimenta of musical education.

MRS. FLETCHER *is discovered waiting for her hostess to descend. Enter* MRS. PARENT. *She is one of those unfortunate persons who are all mother.*

MRS. PARENT

I am so glad to see you! I hope you will excuse my keeping you waiting. I was just in the midst of a little argument with my little Willy — he is such a very bright child that he is difficult to manage, sometimes. You know how it is with brilliant children? His teacher often says that she is simply discouraged with him, he is so bright — but then I think that teachers seldom understand children! It really takes a mother to get the best out of a child; I often tell Willy's teacher so, when she complains of him. (*Enter* EDDIE *and* ELLY PARENT, *twins, aged five. They linger in the doorway eyeing Mrs. Fletcher with sidelong*

glances. At that distance they are really as alluring as their mother thinks them.) I hope you don't object to having the children come down while we have tea? It is so good for them to see strangers.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With the enthusiasm of one to whom children are a novelty*) No, indeed, I like it. How do you do, darlings?

MRS. PARENT

(*Sternly*) Elly, shake hands with Mrs. Fletcher. (*She beams upon her approaching offspring*) Mercy! Don't forget your curtsey! (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) I don't know what has come over the child; she makes one every morning to the man who mows the grass — and now she won't do it for her mother's friends. (ELLY *bobs solemnly before* MRS. FLETCHER) That's better — Eddie! Where is your bow? What does Mother teach you a bow for? (EDDIE *bends his proud head with all the sullenness of meticulous obedience*)

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Ingratiatingly*) I like little children.

EDDIE

(*Looking her sternly eye to eye*) I don't like you.

MRS. PARENT

Oh, Eddie, darling! That wasn't kind. Mother's boy

should always try to be kind. See, the poor lady's feelings are hurt. (*This appeal having produced nothing in the way of human softness in* EDDIE, MRS. PARENT *abruptly tries another avenue*) She has a cunning little yellow canary at her house; perhaps some day if you are a good boy, she will let you see it. (EDDIE, *declining definitely to be interested in a hypothetical little yellow canary, privateers off into the corners of the room, accompanied by his sister. To* MRS. FLETCHER) I suppose you are very gay.

MRS. FLETCHER

Oh no, not very.

(*The tea is brought in, and* ELLY *and* EDDIE *circle closer, their round eyes on toast and cake*)

MRS. PARENT

(*With an evident effort to ignore them*) Of course, you do so much all the time. (ELLY *approaches the table, and with her innocent gaze fixed on her mother's face, she ventures a raid on the sugar bowl*) Elly Parent! Don't touch that sugar! Hasn't Mother often told you you mustn't? (*The corners of* ELLY's *mouth draw down, and her eyes fill*) . . Mercy! don't cry! There! — Take some if you want it. (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) I always wonder how you stand it.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Bewildered*) Stand what?

MRS. PARENT

Why, going out so much. Of course, my life is so tranquil. (*Enter* WILLY PARENT, *a thirteen-year-old hope*) Willy, you will be late for your music lesson, unless you hurry. (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) I don't understand where that child gets his tardiness — I am never late. . . . Of course, his father's mother was one of the most dilatory persons I ever saw — her living so long was perfectly typical of it. . . . Now, I shan't do that — I shall wear out; I often tell my husband so. (*Sighs*) What is it, Willy?

WILLY

C'n I have some cake?

MRS. PARENT

Well, just a little piece — if you hurry. . . . Your coat doesn't look very nice, Willy. Why did you wear that one?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Interposing in* WILLY'S *behalf*) Do you take music lessons? How nice! (WILLY, *occupied in munching, contents himself with a stolid stare*)

MRS. PARENT

(*Nervously averting attention from a child too old to be publicly rebuked with safety*) Are — are you going to Europe next Spring?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Surprised*) Why no, I don't expect to —

MRS. PARENT

Willy, hurry up! I never saw such dirty hands! (WILLY *crams down cake*) Why, Willy!

WILLY

(*Defiantly*) Well, you told me to hurry.

MRS. PARENT

You can hurry like a little gentleman, I should hope! (WILLY *stamps towards door*) Willy! Why, Willy! you've forgotten to kiss Mother! (WILLY *pauses, and indulges in a moment's irresolute rebellion before he returns to drop a reluctant salute on his mother's offered cheek*)

WILLY

(*With relief*) There!

MRS. PARENT

That's better! (*Exit* WILLY, *not in the most perfect frame of mind for music, unless of the variety intended to soothe the savage breast. To* MRS. FLETCHER) I am very particular about things like that. I am a believer in a mother's softening influence upon her sons. . . . I don't know what I shall do about Willy's manners; he is so bright — that is the trouble; if he were an ordinary child it would be easy enough to manage him.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Vaguely and comfortingly*) Yes, indeed!

MRS. PARENT

Have you been to the opera yet? I want to go, but I haven't managed to get there.— Eddie, don't take such big mouthfuls! Aren't you ashamed to have Mother's friend see you? (*To* Mrs. Fletcher) His nurse is so careless with him; he is a sweet child naturally — he has a lovely disposition, really.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am sure of it.

MRS. PARENT

Elly, don't lean against Mrs. Fletcher in that way, — you'll make her spill her tea. (Elly, *startled, backs away, into* Mrs. Fletcher's *right arm, and the tea is spilled*) There! now see what you have done! I am so sorry, Mrs. Fletcher!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Meretriciously*) It's nothing, really. . . . Did you know that Elsie Worthington is engaged?

MRS. PARENT

Do tell me all about the man.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Surreptitiously mopping her skirt*) Well, he's very bright, they say, and —

MRS. PARENT

Eddie, if you will take such big mouthfuls Mother will have to send you out of the room — and you such a big boy! (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) I haven't ever met him yet. (*To* ELLY) Elly, come here and let Mother tie your hair ribbon. (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) It seems as if nothing in this house were well done unless I did it myself! He's a good deal older than she, isn't he?

MRS. FLETCHER

Yes, he must be, he is — (ELLY *approaches her mother, and whispers in her ear*)

MRS. PARENT

Can you wear your pink dress to the party next week? Does that have to be decided now? (ELLY *immediately flies danger signals*) Well, — I don't care, — wear it if you want to. (*To* MRS. FLETCHER) She will have lovely wedding presents.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Bewildered*) Who will?

MRS. PARENT

(*Making an unsuccessful effort to fence* EDDIE *from the sugar bowl*) Why, Elsie Worthington.

MRS. FLETCHER

I suppose so; she is so well liked —

ELLY

C'n I have some more sugar?

MRS. PARENT

More sugar! No, indeed!

ELLY

(*Tearfully*) Well, Eddie did.

MRS. PARENT

I don't care if he did — you can't. (*To* Mrs. Fletcher) Everyone seems to get married, — there's scarcely a month without a wedding present — Eddie, give your little sister half of your sugar — mind Mother, Eddie, — instantly. (Eddie, *after a perceptible pause of silent insurrection, obeys. To* Mrs. Fletcher) Elly and Eddie are twins, you know, and I often think the bond between them is stronger than it is between other children. They want to share everything. (*A sudden uproar from* Elly *causes* Mrs. Fletcher *to start nervously in her chair*) Elly, what *is* it?

ELLY

(*Her voice broken by sobs, but still piercing*) Eddie took my sugar!

MRS. PARENT

Eddie, give your little sister her sugar at once! Do you hear Mother?

EDDIE

(*Swallowing with terrifying violence*) It's gone.

MRS. PARENT

(*To* Elly) Never mind, precious, — you shall have another piece. . . . (*To* Mrs. Fletcher) Oh, — you're not *going?* Why, we haven't had any talk at all.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am so sorry, I must.

MRS. PARENT

Well, I hope that tea didn't stain your dress. . . . Elly, say good-bye to Mrs. Fletcher — don't forget to make your curtsey — Eddie, make your bow. . . . I'm sorry you must go. Good-bye.

X

THE GENTLER SEX

MRS. WOOD

(*Middle-aged, philanthropic, and breathless*) Do I look terribly disheveled? (*In an unfortunate effort to bring order out of chaos, she re-implants a hat pin, and firmly fixes her hat rather more upon one side than it was before.*) Such a day as I have had.

MRS. FLETCHER

What have you been doing?

MRS. WOOD

It is much simpler to tell you what I haven't.

MRS. VANE

(*A woman who occupies herself without any particular accomplishment. She folds her hands with some ostentation*) I think we women are all very much too busy.

MISS STUART

(*She is youngish, businesslike, and excessively neat. She is so extremely executive that she very nearly gives the*

Mrs. Vane

impression of being talented.) I think it is good for us to be busy. Why should we, with the same inheritance of energy as the American man, do nothing? . . . May I have my tea very strong, please — really quite black? (MRS. FLETCHER *pours cup*) Thank you — that is quite perfect.

MRS. VANE

My dear, how do your nerves stand it?

MISS STUART

(*Lightly*) Oh they don't, of course. I am fidgety and I don't sleep — but I am never bored. My idea of the worst thing that can happen to a woman is to have time hanging on her hands. . . . Tell us what you have been doing, Mrs. Wood — and when you have done I think I can agree to equal it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Let us all, for the good of our souls, confess our sins of commission. . . . We have none of omission, I am sure — we modern Chicago women!

MRS. WOOD

Well, I was up very early, and had my breakfast ahead of John and the children — I find that quite restful — and I wanted to get away before people began telephoning me. You know how that is — when the telephone once starts ringing, there is no escape.

MRS. VANE AND MISS STUART

Yes, indeed — we know.

MRS. FLETCHER

Every woman knows!

MRS. WOOD

And at nine o'clock I was at a committee meeting over town. It was important — we were discussing a new milk supply for the Orphans' Home — and it lasted an hour. Even then I left before it was over, because I had to preside at a hospital board meeting. We have a hundred thousand dollars to raise before we can hope to build, and we decided how to go about that to-day. Before luncheon the treasurer and I rounded up the bank presidents, and persuaded them to subscribe, as a beginning.

MRS. VANE

(*Brightly introducing a lighter topic*) I lunched at the Blackstone. It was very amusing; everyone was there.

MRS. WOOD

(*Relentlessly*) Well, I didn't. I lunched at a department store, because it was the nearest and quickest. That is my only consideration, these days.

MRS. FLETCHER

And then what?

MRS. WOOD

Well, then I did take the time to buy a new hat; my husband told me I really must. . . . Clothes are such a bore!

MRS. VANE

(*With the horror of one listening to a sacrilege*) Oh, Mrs. Wood!

MRS. WOOD

And then I went to a lecture on tenement conditions at the Fine Arts Building. I wanted to see if the man had anything new to say, but he hadn't. . . . It was one of those lectures where the tenements are discovered to débutantes.

MRS. FLETCHER

But so few people have anything new to say, Mrs. Wood. . . . Everything, after all, has been said.

MISS STUART

That's only what you literary people think! There are plenty of new things to say if you will interest yourself in results instead of in thought.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder? You almost tempt me.

MISS STUART

(*Ably*) You still have at least an hour and a half to account for, Mrs. Wood.

MRS. WOOD

(*Triumphantly*) I went from the lecture to see the plans for the new hospital building, and spent a half hour over that. Then I ran in to the Visiting Nurses' offices to look up a case, and after that I stopped long enough to buy some hair ribbons and some shoe strings — I am not a believer in neglecting my children — and here I am. . . . May I have a second cup, please?

MRS. FLETCHER

You may, indeed.

MISS STUART

(*Briskly*) Well, I was up early, too, and before breakfast I had a ride in the park. Then I came home and dressed, and at half after nine I was at my Italian lesson. At eleven I went to the Morning Club, and spoke in a discussion on the "Leisure Class," and at one I was at the model flat on Halsted Street, teaching little Polish girls how to cook oatmeal.

MRS. VANE

But, my dear, how did you know how?

MISS STUART

Oh, I looked it up in a cook book on the way over, in the car. . . . I couldn't get away from there until almost three — oatmeal is so surprisingly slow — and then I hurried home and outlined an article on "Practical

Gardening for Graduates," that I had promised to write for the Bryn Mawr paper. After that I made up my treasurer's accounts for the Lunch Club, and wrote out my secretary's minutes for the Literary Club, and then I decided that I must have tea and conversation, so I ran over here. To-night I am going out to dinner and the theatre, and I must finish my gardening article when I get home, but I can do it easily enough, because I don't sleep much, anyway. . . . There's my day.

MRS. VANE

And I thought I had been busy.

MRS. FLETCHER

Tell us your troubles, Mother.

MRS. VANE

I did my housekeeping first; I am very old-fashioned — my house won't run itself, I find. I don't see how you young women manage, when you give so little time to it. To-day I even went to market. (*She pauses in conscious self-complacency*)

MRS. WOOD

Well, I am not a believer in going to market. Whenever I do I am tempted by artichokes and early asparagus, and extravagant things like that which never come into my head if I simply order beans over the telephone.

MRS. VANE

(*Stiffly*) From there I went over town, and I did a great deal — really a very great deal — of shopping.

MRS. FLETCHER

The bundles have been coming all day. They are mountain high!

MRS. VANE

I suppose so. . . . A great many will have to be returned, of course. . . . You know how it is, after a clerk has had all the bother of showing you something — it is much easier to take it than to say you won't have it. It is so perfectly simple just to send it back again for credit.

MRS. WOOD

And is that all?

MRS. VANE

No, indeed. I lunched at the Blackstone, and after that I went home with Mrs. Rand, to play bridge. I won the prize; a really lovely cretonne desk set. The only trouble is that I haven't a place to use it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Never mind, Mother. There is always the possibility of giving away bridge prizes. Christmas is coming!

MISS STUART

And what have you been doing, Mrs. Fletcher?

MRS. FLETCHER

I? Oh, I never do anything! I have spent the day in trying to find some woman to play with — but I failed. Not one of my friends was playing! I went out to luncheon, and met rather an interesting Frenchman, and I dropped in at an exhibition of pictures — that is all.

MISS STUART

That isn't much of a day, I must say.

MRS. VANE

(*Her maternal feathers ruffled*) I think we women shouldn't be so rushed.

MRS. WOOD

Well, there are just so many things to be done. Who would take them up if we dropped them?

MRS. VANE

(*Voicing the ideal of the woman of her generation, and the man of all time*) Women should stop at home. . . . They should try to be tranquil and beautiful — not busy and successful. We are all just like the men these days — there is no difference at all.

MRS. FLETCHER

Ah yes, there is. There is one tremendous difference between a woman with a job and a man with one.

MISS STUART

What is it?

MRS. FLETCHER

The woman loves to discuss hers at dinner, and the man does not. *Enter* MR. WEBBER *and* MR. ALEXANDER)

MRS. FLETCHER

How do you do, lords of creation?

WEBBER

It is a refreshing thing to find so many ladies gathered peacefully about a tea table, isn't it, Alexander?

ALEXANDER

When a man comes up from town, and finds you all sitting around like this — with nothing to do but talk — he realizes (*gloomily*) that life isn't all work.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With a feminine woman's ready sympathy for a man s troubles*) Have you had a hard day?

ALEXANDER

(*Reluctantly*) Not very. There's nothing doing in the market just now. A man turned up from New York, and I had to take him out to lunch, and put him on his train. . . . He's just gone.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*To* WEBBER) And you?

WEBBER

Oh, fairly so. I've been trying all day to get hold of an idea that wouldn't come. . . . Most annoying! . . . May we have some tea? — while we drink it suppose you tell us hard-working men how you have all been amusing yourselves.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Thoughtfully pouring the tea*) No, on the whole, I think we won't. . . .

XI

MODERN FICTION

MRS. FLETCHER

Miss Aline, may I give you some tea?

MISS ALINE

(*A young woman whose chief aim in life is to read new books before the reviewers do, and to display upon her table the English editions of those books the American editions of which are still in press.*) I will let you fill it again. (*She passes her cup*) I really am dependent on it. Luncheon I am indifferent to, and dinner is mainly important as a conversational opportunity, but tea is my real staff of life!

ALEXANDER

(*Who asks from talk a relaxation merely*) By Jove! (*He silently plies her first with the buttered toast and then the cake*)

WEBBER

(*To whom a mental state is more important than a physical one*) "Count that day lost whose low descending sun shines not upon" — a certain number of cups consumed — is that it, Miss Aline?

MISS ALINE

(*Complacently*) It is the most meritorious bad habit I have.

MRS. FLETCHER

Do you remember, only a few years ago, when, to the average American, the afternoon tea of the English novel was an unattainable sophistication? . . . Of course I don't mean unattainable to us; present company is always sophisticated and never average.

WEBBER

I think Henry James brought it within reach of the Middle West. His casual references to serving it on lawns made a mere drawing-room seem simple.

ALEXANDER

(*With dismal reflections on various first chapters hopefully plunged into*) I didn't know he ever made anything seem that!

MISS ALINE

Novels about English people have done a great work in civilizing us Americans

WEBBER

They did in the earlier days, when our manners were forming — and when we turned to Emerson and Brook Farm for our morals. I imagine that while our fathers

were delighted to read of Vauxhall, and intrigues, and royal drawing rooms — all were equally removed from the pioneer — they clung at the same time to the belief that early to bed and early to rise brought a man all the reward a reasonable being might ask. It diverted them, but it didn't demoralize them. . . . We of this generation are different; we have outgrown our moralists, and the mirror England holds before her society does not reflect us.

MRS. FLETCHER

No, it only upsets us. We recognize our characteristics, and don't take into consideration the difference in our situations.

WEBBER

We are just far enough behind England in our development to feel, when we read her modern writers, that we are being interpreted for the first time. They discover us to ourselves.

ALEXANDER

(*Voicing the intolerance of the uncomprehending*) I'd hate to think that we were like the people the English Johnnies write about. . . . Not that I read their books; they're too gloomy. . . . They're disagreeable. . . . They're unwholesome. . . . When I read I want to be amused; that's what a man gives the time to it for.

MISS ALINE

(*Severely*) You forget, Mr. Alexander, that literature is the most serious thing in the world.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Kindly attempting to draw the fire*) And yet the man who takes himself seriously cannot produce it — he can only write books.

ALEXANDER

(*Sulkily*) There are so many books written each year that it must be a simple trick if a man has the knack of it.

MRS. FLETCHER

You'll be trying it yourself soon! . . . Why not go in for producing a "best seller," Mr. Alexander?

MISS ALINE

What a humiliation that would be!

ALEXANDER

(*Defiantly*) Well, if I ever did try to write a story it would be about the kind of people and the kind of things we all know all about. I like to read about what I like to do — about house parties — and polo matches — and motor trips — not about people who haven't enough to eat, and who can't pay their rent, and who don't do anything — or go anywhere — but just sit at home and think!

MRS. FLETCHER

There is something in what you say, Mr. Alexander. . . . I can't answer for the men, but I imagine that more women of the reading classes die of thinking than of action.

MISS ALINE

And action is, after all, very old school, nowadays, and I think the subject matters strangely little. . . . It is the treatment that is of value, because that is real personality, and, of course, personality is nothing but style, and — (*triumphantly*) —you will, naturally, admit that style is the really important thing.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder if we are as academic as that?

ALEXANDER

(*Stubbornly clinging, as to a life raft, to his one instinctive idea*) I don't know anything about that; haven't thought of it since I was in college, and flunked English C; but what I want to know is, why the chaps that write books don't use their style on the best people. I am tired of hearing about the poor and the abused. If I want to find out about 'em I can read a United Charities report. . . . Why don't they write about people like us?

MRS. FLETCHER

Ah, but they sometimes do, Mr. Alexander. Those are the books that are damned as artificial.

WEBBER

Yes, we are such an unimportant froth — we "best people" — that when a writer with real power and a feeling for the human thing, comes along — he knows enough to let us alone. . . . We are not living, you know, we are only looking at life. We are not even symbolic.

MISS ALINE

(*Practically*) And, anyway, you get a much firmer effect if you deal with extremes, and in America, of course, we have no real aristocracy.

WEBBER

And the poor we have always with us. They have the importance of permanency.

MISS ALINE

And, at any rate, good modern fiction does not deal so much with facts of environment as with facts of temperament. That is what makes it so much more poignant than its predecessors.

WEBBER

Time was when people demanded of a writer the telling of what a reader would do in a given situation, and that

was simple enough. Nowadays we demand the telling of what he would feel.

MRS. FLETCHER

We have turned our attention from the romantic to the emotional. I fancy it is the natural development of inactive lives.

ALEXANDER

But why should emotions always be disagreeable? I don't know anything about 'em — I'm a busy man — I haven't time for 'em — but can't emotion make a man laugh as well as cry?

MRS. FLETCHER

If they are dismal, it is the fault of the writer; it is his personal view of life only, so don't blame the emotions. They are nothing but instincts, and I should hate to believe that all our instinct for joy is gone.

WEBBER

The modern artist is a melancholy creature; the day of the care-free pagan seems to be past. Our civilization has been too much for his nervous system.

MRS. FLETCHER

And you must remember that people who are unhappy are the ones who produce. No one who is miserable can resist expressing it — while happiness is so absorbing that it does not give one time to do anything but live.

ALEXANDER

But the worst thing about all this unhealthy stuff you women read is that it makes you discontented. . . . It's bad for you; it sets you thinking.

MRS. FLETCHER

That is an unfortunate thing to happen to any woman.

ALEXANDER

(*Placing his cup on the table, and preparing to fly before further discussion*) It's all too ugly.

MRS. FLETCHER

But, Mr. Alexander, it is a real test of optimism to find beauty in ugly things. If a writer can do that for us he is justified.

ALEXANDER

Well, I don't claim to be an optimist. I'm just a plain man, and I like to be comfortable — inside and out. If life is like that I don't want to hear about it — and — what's more — I don't believe it is!

WEBBER

You are right, Alexander. Physical energy for the effect on feeling is the object of modern fiction — and feeling for the effect on physical energy is the object of nature. . . . There is a big difference.

MRS. FLETCHER

Yes, one is vital, and the other is not.

MISS ALINE

And yet we call our later writers realists.

WEBBER

Realism in art is only expressing life as the particular artist sees it. It is his sincerity that gives it value, but it isn't necessarily truth. No man can see life as it really is; he is too near it.

MRS. FLETCHER

And it is not what the artist sees that we care for — it is what he feels. If he can make us feel the genuineness of his feeling we are satisfied — for while art can exist and not be true to life, it must be true to its creator. We come back to personality, after all. . . .

XII

CONSERVATION

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Living a life hemmed in by conventions, she delights in considering herself a free agent.*) Here is your tea, Mr. Paston.

PASTON

(*He is a short, bland man, with a look of perennial middle-age. A member of the National Conservation Association*) Thank you.

WEBBER

(*Lightly*) It looks to me as though you had given him more than his share of cream; according to the principles of conservation you should have saved it for another day.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder how popular a move conservation would be if it interfered with the private life of people. . . . Do you think we should believe in it then?

WEBBER

(*Interested in all theories, and champion of none.*) It would take a big man to popularize that!

MRS. VANE

(*A believer in laissez-faire.*) I think it would be very annoying.

PASTON

It is reasonable to believe it might be good for us as a race.

WEBBER

Physically it would be, beyond a doubt — but the question arises as to whether the physical side of the American people is more important than the spiritual one.

MRS. VANE

How can you say that, Mr. Webber, when you have so many friends in sanitariums and rest cures all the time? It is really difficult, sometimes, to have a rubber of bridge — so many women go away to get their nerves in shape.

MRS. FLETCHER

And to get their new clothes, Mother. Don't forget that!

PASTON

But nervous breakdowns might be prevented if taken in time, Mrs. Vane. Nerves should not be heedlessly destroyed, any more than any other heritage.

MRS. FLETCHER

But who wouldn't rather have her fun — and pay for it if she must, — than always to be saving, — and possibly in

the end never getting anything? I have always felt that the danger of providing for a rainy day was that it might continue to shine, after all.

MRS. VANE

I should want to be very sure that it was necessary before I gave up anything. I think that when we look back we don't regret the things we did do, one-half so much as the things we didn't.

WEBBER

That is the tragedy of youth, Mrs. Vance — the harmless things that seemed dangerous, and were avoided.

MRS. FLETCHER

And the tragedy of age is the things that really are dangerous — and can't be avoided.

PASTON

If we were regulated by an association we should conserve youth, and old age would be vitalized.

MRS. FLETCHER

That might be rather dreadful, don't you think? No one could tell where it might lead. . . . Even as things are, we see grandmothers wearing garden hats — but think how much worse it would be if they were to look arch under them!

MRS. VANE

(*Stiffly*) I like to see a woman keep her youth, myself.

WEBBER

And looking arch isn't a question of years; it is entirely one of spectators.

MRS. FLETCHER

But, seriously, can any of you imagine anything more exasperating than being interfered with by a committee that fancied it knew more about you than you knew yourself.

PASTON

(*In the heat of argument recklessly abandoning his tea*) Such guidance might save a great many mistakes.

MRS. FLETCHER

I doubt it. No one can tell where another person needs guidance, and nothing is more boring than people who insist on saving you from something you know never can happen to you.

MRS. VANE

One of the most noticeable things about the advice people are always giving you is that it is invariably wrong.

MRS. FLETCHER

But it has a perfectly definite value in cementing one's decisions against it. I have often been quite undecided —

entirely at sea, in fact — when a word from a friend urging one horn of my dilemma, made me instantly impale myself upon the other.

WEBBER

That is very human of you, Mrs. Fletcher. Wouldn't your system, Paston, defy the Declaration of Independence? Does it allow for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"?

PASTON

But life — a longer and more useful one — would be our aim — and is it your idea that we have liberty under the present conditions?

MRS. FLETCHER

At least we are free to abuse our health if we like. . . . We may go without sleep, for instance.

MRS. VANE

Yes — and eat rich foods. I think that one of the most discouraging things about life is that all the things we are told are good for us to eat are so singularly unappetizing.

PASTON

But there are a great many harmless things we may not do, because convention forbids them.

MRS. VANE

Well, Mr. Paston, I will confess that I like convention.

It makes everything so smooth — so easy. Without it, life would be like a picture puzzle when the pieces don't fit.

PASTON

I don't propose to abandon conventions — Heaven forbid! — but only to introduce another set of them.

WEBBER

You have accounted fairly well for life and liberty, Paston — more days in this land, and duller ones — and a substitution of tyrannies. How about happiness?

PASTON

We are only promised the pursuit of it, you know.

MRS. FLETCHER

And what is happiness?

WEBBER

That is a big question, Mrs. Fletcher. It might be so many things, depending on one's mood. I suppose it is satisfaction — to put it mildly — or success — worldly or otherwise, according to one's ambitions. I fancy that is the strong man's feeling about it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Nonsense! The strong man is he who takes failure

well. It is a sign of weakness always to demand a personal triumph.

MRS. VANE

I find that my idea of happiness is changing. I used to think that it was getting what I wanted, but now I find that I am quite well pleased if my daughter gets what she wants. . . . Of course I am not so young as the rest of you.

WEBBER

One of the interesting things in life is that we each think we must necessarily reach the highest form of self development — must follow every impulse towards it — until suddenly we are confronted with the development of another that is more important to us than our own. . . . I fancy it is one of the compensations for years and responsibility — and while it isn't joy it must be happiness.

MRS. FLETCHER

What is your idea of it, Mr. Paston?

PASTON

I think that nine times out of ten happiness is simply health — nothing more complex! The trouble with it is — not that people don't get it — but that, when they do, they waste it. . . . Experience has shown that — and we aim to do away with waste.

MRS. FLETCHER

Ah, Mr. Paston — experience! What value has that? It only teaches us to understand others! we never apply it to ourselves until it is too late.

WEBBER

And experience, after all, is only a sort of illustration to the text of our lives.

MRS. VANE

But I like illustrations — don't you? I think they do so much towards helping out a dull article.

PASTON

(*With the blind optimism of the enthusiast*) Mental conservation would do much for dulness; people are like lands — they need nourishing.

WEBBER

Aren't our universities taking care of that?

PASTON

Yes, to a certain extent — but how about a change of crops?

WEBBER

That, I imagine, is what our industrial conditions prevent.

PASTON

Exactly. There's a vast amount of mental aridity that might be done away with.

MRS. FLETCHER

It all depends on what you want. . . . There is this to be said about an arid region — it forms a contrast to a fertile one, and contrasts spur the imagination. . . . When all our arid lands — mental and physical — are reclaimed, we shall all have a great deal too much to eat — and too little to think about.

MRS. VANE

I believe that one of the reasons that California seems so lovely is that you come into it from the desert.

WEBBER

However you sugar-coat it, Paston, you will have to admit that moderation is an unpopular thing to go in for. It must necessarily be completely boring, for it has lasting qualities and no poignancy.

MRS. FLETCHER

And, after all, we Americans cannot bear being interfered with — not even for the good of the state. . . . It is better to be unhappy in your own way than happy in

anyone's else. (*She tentatively lifts her tea pot*) I have some tea left, Mr. Paston. It should be a matter of conscience with you to take another cup, for you should not allow it to be wasted.

XIII

PLAYWRITING

MRS. FLETCHER

(*She is interested in life as a pageant, and delights in comment rather than in action.*) What have you been doing to-day, Mother?

MRS. VANE

(*A woman who finds a succession of events more amusing then arrested attention.*) I have just come from a meeting of the Afternoon Club where they read an amateur play. . . . It seems as if everyone were writing plays these days. Don't you think so?

WEBBER

Well, I shouldn't go so far as to say that — but a great many people are using the dramatic form.

MRS. VANE

When I was young no one ever thought of such a thing — and now it's really more common than playing the piano! . . . I suppose that is because it must be easier. It takes such a long time to learn to play — especially without notes, and practising is so very tiresome.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With mock seriousness*) You encourage me. Mother, I believe I'll try my hand at the drama.

WEBBER

(*Eagerly*) I wish you would. I'm sure you have ample material.

ALEXANDER

But whatever would you write a play about?

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder. . . . If you will sharpen my pencils for me, Mr. Webber — and if you, Mr. Alexander, will loan me your stenographer and her typewriter — I believe I will write a play on the wrongs of the American woman!

ALEXANDER

But she never does wrong.

MRS. FLETCHER

Does wrong? I should think not! — But she suffers them, as every one knows who goes to the theatre.

MRS. VANE

I am so very tired of seeing unpleasant things at the theatre. What I like is a sweet, pretty little play that sends me home feeling very comfortable.

ALEXANDER

Right, Mrs. Vane! — With something snappy in dances! . . . I don't know what is the matter with our native playwrights; they spend all their time showing up American life as it isn't — but would be if it were in Norway — or Russia — or France.

WEBBER

(*Oblivious*) There are burning subjects enough right here in this town.

MRS. FLETCHER

But I don't want a burning subject; I want to find something that just pleasantly glows. . . . Now I suppose you, Mr. Webber, would like me to write a play about low wages and high beef prices — with the hero in a sweater, and the heroine in black sateen — and a two weeks' run if we were lucky.

ALEXANDER

(*Agitatedly*) There's nothing in plays like that. Every chap I know's bored to death at 'em, and never comes back after the first intermission. . . . You never hear 'em mentioned at my club!

MRS. VANE

(*Soothingly*) I am sure, Mr. Alexander, that my daughter would not dream of writing a play in which the

leading lady could not wear French gowns. What would be the use of it? . . . I always think it is a real triumph to the playwright if the dresses the women in his company wear are just a little ahead of the models at the dressmaker's, it makes it all so very interesting.

WEBBER

I'll admit that in the modern play more attention is paid to clothes than to dialogue; it is a triumph of matter over mind.

MRS. FLETCHER

A mere man can't appreciate the emotional value of the latest shade of cerise worn on the Rue de la Paix, Mother — that is asking too much.

WEBBER

(*Doggedly*) And may I ask what you intend doing with your beautifully coiffed and gowned heroine?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Lightly*) Oh, the usual thing! . . . Her troubles will affect her peace of mind, — for I, too, have read my Ibsen — but she will triumphantly preserve the bloom worthy of the leading lady in a French farce.

ALEXANDER

(*Soulfully selecting his cake*) It listens good to me! Is she to be married or single?

WEBBER

MRS. FLETCHER

What a question! — Do you ever hear, nowadays, of a strictly up-to-date heroine who is not married?

WEBBER

It's true — they must all have entered the holy state of matrimony.

MRS. VANE

But some of them have left it.

ALEXANDER

Yes — by Jove! — left it for the unholy state of South Dakota!

MRS. VANE

I can't think why we never see, any more, the young and fresh heroine. I really miss her.

WEBBER

It is true, what you say. The popular age for heroines has jumped from seventeen to twenty-seven. . . . Is it, I wonder, that we are more sophisticated — or that lovely ladies are better preserved?

MRS. FLETCHER

Both, I fancy. . . . It's the penalty we pay for growing civilized. . . . I should think the débutantes would be bored, for now no one writes even poetry to fresh

simplicity. Daisies do not spring where the modern heroine walks.

ALEXANDER

We are certainly going in for peaches without bloom, in our generation.

MRS. FLETCHER

Unfortunately one cannot have a fresh complexion without also having a fresh mind — and nothing is more boring than that.

ALEXANDER

Whom will your heroine be married to, Mrs. Fletcher? What sort of a chap?

MRS. VANE

Really a great deal depends on that — I often think so.

MRS. FLETCHER

Oh, he'll be the typical American man.

ALEXANDER

What is the typical American man?

MRS. FLETCHER

Why, he'll be hard-working, with no time even to notice how many thousand things his wife knows a little about. . . . He'll never have read "The Golden Bowl" — and he won't care anything about modern English fiction — and he'll be too tired to get anything out of music.

He'll take it for granted that his wife is immensely his superior — she'll have given so much time to it — but he won't bother about it; on the whole he prefers it that way.

MRS. VANE

(*Approvingly*) That's as it should be.

WEBBER

(*Seriously*) And then what?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Speaking slowly, and realizing her plot as she goes on*) She'll fill up her life with the easy, diverting things until she will be getting on a bit, and time begins to look valuable to her. Then she'll realize that there are some things she hasn't — and never will have, unless she goes after them.

WEBBER

What sort of things?

MRS. FLETCHER

Oh, understanding, you know — and sympathy.

ALEXANDER

Oh, yes — all that rot!

MRS. FLETCHER

And then something will have to happen to her. . . . That is the worst thing about writing a play; in life things

don't necessarily happen — but in plays they must . . . I wonder what?

ALEXANDER

(*Doubtfully and with the air of one who dares much*) She might come across an affinity.

MRS. FLETCHER

But affinities have been used so often — and, besides that, don't you think they are a little pallid? . . . She might not, of course — that would be a perfectly good climax.

MRS. VANE

(*Looking at her daughter and sighing*) It has been my experience that when a woman gets to the place in her life where she begins to feel the need of an affinity her children begin to feel the need of her, and children are very occupying.

WEBBER

That is a good idea, Mrs. Vane. . . . Or she might make a life's work of educating her husband.

MRS. FLETCHER

Almost anything will do. . . . The point is that she must read her own soul in the third act.

MRS. VANE

It must be at a ball — or something of that kind — so that she will have an opportunity to look very well.

WEBBER

The setting is important — why not try having the first act in a rolling mill? As far as I know that has never been done.

ALEXANDER

And the second on the top of a twenty-story building at an aviation station — or on the beach of the Philippines, with some native stunts worked in — something doing every minute.

MRS. FLETCHER

And the last act in her husband's office, to symbolize their reunion.

WEBBER

Or her drawing-room, if you decide against it.

MRS. FLETCHER

And there we have everything that is necessary for a successful play!

WEBBER

Yes — the exploiting of the time-honored, grief-stricken wife — in perfectly new surroundings. . . . You'll have the great-hearted American audience with you to a woman!

ALEXANDER

(*With a trace of sulkiness*) I don't see what the American woman has to complain of; there's hardly one you know, who hasn't her motor — and her pearls — and all

that sort of thing. . . . Our men have their troubles too! Why don't they write plays about 'em?

MRS. FLETCHER

Oh, they haven't time; they are too busy earning money to support their wives and families.

XIV

SPRING FEVER

WEBBER

I have walked up along the lake, and Spring is in the air.

ALEXANDER

(*Untroubled by mental conflicts*) The parks are full of people wandering about in pairs; a man has to run his car slowly, there are so many.

MRS. FLETCHER

And every lass has a new straw hat!

MRS. VANE

Some of them are really extraordinary this year.

WEBBER

It must be a frightful struggle for a young woman to divide her attention between a young man and an Easter bonnet.

MRS. FLETCHER

On the contrary, it's no struggle at all; the young man hasn't a chance!

ALEXANDER

It's only a husband that's always connected with a new hat.

WEBBER

Spring and the fashions seem to have an intimate bond, for some obscure reason not comprehensible to the mere male. I find that at this time of the year I don't thrill, particularly, over new clothes, and yet I passed no less than three sets of young women, walking arm in arm, their heads close together, and their hands full of samples. They were completely absorbed, and their expressions were nothing less than poetic.

MRS. FLETCHER

It is impossible to explain. Like everything that is instinctive — you feel it, but you can't tell about it. In the Autumn clothes bore me to extinction, but in the Spring I dream about them at night! . . . After all, the value of an emotion is not to be fixed by the thing that arouses it, but by the vivifying quality it gives to our every-day life.

MRS. VANE

(*Illustrating the maxim that to the unobserving all things are unobserved*) And Summer things are so light and pretty; they are frightfully tempting. I always spend the Summer regretting my extravagances of the Spring.

WEBBER

They are to wear in the open; I fancy that is the subconscious explanation.

ALEXANDER

They are ordered at an opening — that is more to the point!

MRS. VANE

(*Eagerly*) Isn't it strange the effect an opening has on one? I always go determined not to get anything — of course you like to see all your friends, and to find out what the fashions are to be — but when I leave I invariably have bought a great many things I don't in the least need.

MRS. FLETCHER

Mr. Webber talks of the "open"; I suppose one doesn't need French frocks for that — but for us — for our country clubs and tennis tournaments — for automobiles and week-ends — we must have the artificialities; they are so entirely in keeping.

WEBBER

(*Irrelevantly*) As I came along the ducks were flying north over the lake, close down, — just a black scratch — but swift and determined and free, and every now and then a little breath of air came off the water — clear and keen and cold.

ALEXANDER

It's the kind of a day that makes you think of the club piazza, and cool things in glasses.

MRS. VANE

It is the kind of a day that makes you think you want to open your country house, and yet all the time you know very well you would be lonely there, and that there is no sense in going to the country ahead of the asparagus.

WEBBER

It is the kind of a day that makes you feel a thousand impulses. It is like modern music; it fills you with little thrilling sensations that come to nothing.

MRS. FLETCHER

You shouldn't ask fulfilment of emotions; they are not like a railroad train, with a definite point of departure and arrival, but like a little vagrant breeze that is here and gone — and you are left the fresher for it.

WEBBER

Of course it is ridiculous to analyze emotions. They can stand life, but not dissection.

ALEXANDER

I went to my florist's this morning to leave my Easter order, and the whole place was full of flowers. When I

opened the door the air was sweet with them. . . . I sent a great many more than I had intended — I even bought some for myself.

MRS. FLETCHER

In the parks, under the shrubs, the crocuses and the snowdrops are out, and I suppose in the real woods, if you brush away the dead leaves, you can find the little hard pink arbutus buds, already fragrant, and almost ready to open.

MRS. VANE

At Chapuis' yesterday the flowers on the hats were really marvelous. I never saw anything so lovely — the French ones, that is. I think the French are so clever; every season they outdo themselves.

ALEXANDER

(*Selecting a frosted cake*) The worst thing about the Spring is that it is always tempting a man to do something he can't pull off.

WEBBER

(*In amazement*) *Et tu, Brute?*

ALEXANDER

(*Loftily, albeit heavily, disregarding Webber's pleasantry*) These days I am always wanting to try a real country road in the motor, when I know all the time it is hub deep in mud, and that no one has moved out to the country yet to put a man up if he did get through.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Voicing, in spite of her conventional life, an unconforming, feral impulse*) Ah, but there is the charm of the unknown road, with the brown woods closing it in, and the keen blue sky overhead. You feel that only to follow it forever is happiness. . . .

WEBBER

It is the uncertainty of what may be around the very next bend — the complete ignorance of what is at the end — that wins us.

MRS. FLETCHER

Is that the witchery, I wonder? If so, Mr. Alexander is wise — it is better not to finish it. Uncertainty is so rare, in these cushioned days, that it has become a delight. Picture to yourself the defeat of going gladly on to the end of the road, and there finding only the same deadening things!

MRS. VANE

(*Sententiously*) There is nothing new under the sun, remember.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder. The Spring makes me hate the old ways. I want to do different things and meet different people. It is probably only a natural reaction following a frivolous Winter, when one has talked — and talked — and talked.

ALEXANDER

One of the reasons I like to go away is to play with another crowd.

MRS. FLETCHER

And that is a very good reason.

WEBBER

To come across someone who is unlike anyone you have ever known before is one of the keenest refreshments a critical person may hope for.

MRS. VANE

I have found that so many of the people who are different from those you already know are really very queer — and I don't like queer people.

MRS. FLETCHER

It is the better way, I fancy, to put Spring fever in its place, but there is a temptation to yield to it, and let it lead us where it will.

WEBBER

Temptations do not hurt us; they only make us sympathetic — just as, when we resist them, they make us strong. It is worth something to understand.

ALEXANDER

I know how the small boy feels who plays hookey. I

hate the thought of my office, these days — and the market isn't so bad, either.

MRS. FLETCHER

Nothing is as alluring, in the first promise of Summer, as complete irresponsibility. . . . The cloud shadows are flying over the prairie, and all the little rivers are running swiftly to the sea — and yet — here we civilized weaklings sit behind walls. . . . The curious thing about it is that we build the walls ourselves, and no one could tell what would be happening to us if they were suddenly cast down — and we used only to sheltered places.

MRS. VANE

I think we are very well off as we are. There's a great deal of nonsense talked about nature. I say, give me comforts.

ALEXANDER

Theory is one thing and practice is another.

WEBBER

Nothing is easier than to persuade yourself that the rules and precepts of your life have been a mistake. It is only when we are confronted with the necessity of actually breaking them that we realize they are stronger than a mere mental attitude.

MRS. FLETCHER

I suppose you are right. (*She sighs — one of the easy sighs that come in the Springtime*)

XV

THE HOUSE PARTY

(MRS. FLETCHER *discovered. She is a woman who possesses a strong social sense — which is nothing more than duty gone right. Enter* MRS. VANE, *who is sufficiently indolent to believe that, when it comes to entertaining guests, the Lord will provide — and sufficiently self-centered not to perceive that He sometimes neglects to.*)

MRS. VANE

What have you been doing all the afternoon? I have had such a nice nap.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Looking at her with envy*) I have been umpiring a tennis match.

MRS. VANE

I thought you didn't like tennis.

MRS. FLETCHER

Like it? I hate it! Miss Gregory brought golf clubs and a racquet with her, and I suppose they weren't entirely for scenic effect. My heart sank when I saw her getting off the train with them; I foresaw my afternoon.

. . . I was never so tired in all my life as I am this moment! And she hasn't so much as seen the golf links yet!

MRS. VANE

(*Comfortably*) You can send her over with Mr. Alexander, in the morning. He is such a sensible young man; he likes to sit on a club piazza.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Bitterly*) Yes — and Miss Gregory wants someone to walk over the entire eighteen holes with her, telling her every stroke that she is a remarkable player! Besides that, Mr. Alexander wants to motor. Didn't you hear him talking, last night at dinner, about the condition of the roads? That is a sure sign. And Mrs. Wilton brought four hats with her, and parasols to match — so I take it for granted that she expects a whirl — that means the dance at the club to-night.

MRS. VANE

And those club dances are so stupid! . . . Mr. Webber was looking for you; he had something he wanted to read aloud.

MRS. FLETCHER

There's the literary temperament for you! Imagine my having time to listen to reading between the train on Friday

"I have been umpiring at a tennis match"

afternoon and the train on Monday morning! (*Enter* MR. ALEXANDER)

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Assuming a sprightly cheerfulness*) What have you been doing with yourself?

ALEXANDER

I? — Oh, I have been walking over Mr. Acre's farm. . . . Wilton got hold of me; I didn't see him first! (*He sinks into a chair with a long, weary sigh*) It was ninety in the shade when we left the porch — and history doesn't state what it was in the pasture!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Automatically*) Poor Mr. Alexander!

MRS. VANE

It is very tiresome to walk about and look at stock.

ALEXANDER

It's me for the kind of stock that's sold on the Exchange — not scattered over a hundred acres of grilling farm land! . . . I saw 'em watering it, too; we can beat that for excitement on La Salle Street, any day. . . . I have looked over forty varieties of chickens — and Heaven knows how many pigs and cows! And as for

squabs — I don't wonder that Noah let the dove go out of the Ark. It's a chance any man would have taken, if he had to live with 'em! . . . I'll wager he was sorry to see it coming home to roost! (*Enter* Miss Gregory, *an athletic week-end guest,* Mrs. Wilton, *a fashionable one, and* Mr. Webber)

MISS GREGORY

That court was first rate — a little slow, but with a turf court, that is the danger. . . . Mrs. Fletcher, you were born to be an umpire. You do it beautifully.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Conventionally*) Oh, I love to — that is why!

MISS GREGORY

Not but what I still think that ball in the second set — third game — when the score was thirty-forty, you know — was really out. . . .

MRS. WILTON

I like to watch tennis; it always brings out so many people one knows. (*To Mrs. Vane*) You should have come; there was a girl there with the queerest dress on! If I hadn't seen her I never could have believed it.

WEBBER

I liked it. I thought it was graceful.

MRS. VANE

(*Scornfully*) Graceful!

MRS. WILTON

Isn't that like a man?

MISS GREGORY

They tell me that the links here are awfully stiff. . . . I can hardly wait to try that third hole. . . . The bogey is six — but I am in pretty good form this year. . . . I can play in the morning, can't I, Mrs. Fletcher? You won't have to think about me at all — just send me over to the club, and I will take care of myself. (*She smiles confidently around the circle*) Someone will want to go around with me, I know.

MRS. WILTON

You are so energetic! Now I should think you would rather stay at home and play bridge, this hot weather. . . . The rest of us may do that — may we not, Mrs. Fletcher?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Mentally counting her party to see if there is a possibility of four hands*) Oh, yes, indeed!

ALEXANDER

That was a great game we had last night. . . . You played that doubled no-trump in the second rubber, Mrs.

Wilton, like a real member of a man's club! When you led that ten of diamonds I thought it was all up with us — but it cleared the suit!

(*Enter* WILTON; *he is a successful man, and he has a merciless interest in farming as practised by bankers.*)

WILTON

Well, I have had an interesting day! (*To his wife*) Sallie, I've learned what Acre feeds his pigs! Wouldn't have missed it for a great deal! And he alternates alfalfa and oats — just the two crops — and he claims he gets a hundred and fifty to a hundred and sixty to the head — but farming is like fishing — a man has a right to exaggerate a little — it's always safer to allow for it. . . . He says that to-morrow he will take me over to Ender's stock farm. You don't care if I go, Mrs. Fletcher? I'll take care of myself; you won't need to think of me.

ALEXANDER

Well, I'd like to run over to Blue Lake to-morrow. I saw a man who went there last week, and he says the roads are in good shape — a little rutty — and dusty, of course — but nothing bad. . . . There is a hill over there that he swears he took on first, and if he did I want to see if I can. . . . If I can't, I know he didn't. . . . There is a very good hotel there — why can't I take you all over for lunch?

WEBBER

(*With hollow regret*) Sorry, Alexander — but I have some work to do. . . . (*To* Mrs. Fletcher) I knew you would understand — my article must be ready by Monday — and that you would not object to my taking some time for myself to-morrow. You won't have to bother about me.

MRS. FLETCHER

No, indeed; don't consider me at all! Of course your article must be written, Mr. Webber — and naturally you want to play golf, Miss Gregory — I'll see to it — and I don't need you at all, Mr. Wilton; you musn't think of me for a moment; I hope you will enjoy your stock farm. . . . And we'll find someone to go on your motor trip, Mr. Alexander — and the rest of us will play bridge, Mrs. Wilton. And now, if you will excuse me for a few moments, I think I will just go in and telephone to town for a few extra men. . . . They never come in amiss. . . .

XVI

BORES

MRS. FLETCHER

(*She is one of those unfortunate persons who, whatever may be their inward rebellion, present an appearance of docile enjoyment of any conversation in which they may be taking part.*) It is amazing, isn't it, how many of the people one meets are boring?

MRS. VANE

(*With the complacency of a woman who has a liking for talk to be compared to the feeling one has for running water; a continuous flow pleases her*) My dear, I find very few people bore me. I think that is a habit of mind you should not allow yourself to get into. It is so easy to think that if a person doesn't talk about just the things that you make a fad of, he is a bore; but that is your fault, not his. If you had no interests in particular, you would find that you didn't much care what he talked about — just so that he kept on talking. Personally, I should rather discuss the weather than nothing. I think the only real bore is the person who never talks at all.

WEBBER

(*With heartfelt emphasis*) But think how much less boring such a habit would make the average bore!

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder what is the most tiresome thing we suffer under?

ALEXANDER

(*Solemnly considering and speaking with grave deliberation*) I think the worst bore is the woman who wants to tell you all about her children — their weights, and what they eat, and the bright things they say. Bright! Good Lord!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Expressing the tenderness of the childless woman*) But all children are interesting; it is only parents who weary you.

MRS. VANE

(*With the finality of a woman who is a mother, and who also takes all emotions for granted*) My dear, that is one of the greatest mistakes in the world; children are not interesting; they are much too self-centered; other people's are a great nuisance.

WEBBER

Children are so ornamental that it is asking too much to demand more of them.

MRS. FLETCHER

If anyone can be successfully beautiful it should be considered enough. Beauty, at least, never satiates. . . . I must confess that I am not particularly enthralled by the man who chooses baseball or the fight at Reno as a topic of conversation. The sporting bore is so vigorous that he is difficult to discourage; the last time I went out to dinner I sat beside one, and it took me until the salad to convey to him the intimation that I didn't in the least care whether Johnson or Jeffries had won.

ALEXANDER

(*Eyeing her askance*) There's nothing the matter with baseball or the fight; they are just two of those things it takes a man's brain to grasp. You should place a bet or two, and see how you feel about them, then!

WEBBER

I believe the greatest bore of them all is the man who insists on telling you how he made his money.

ALEXANDER

(*Shortly*) That's absurd. There's nothing more interesting.

MRS. FLETCHER

I agree with Mr. Alexander; I think the making of money is always of interest. It is the conserving of it, when it is once made, that is difficult to be absorbed in.

WEBBER

Conservation is always uninteresting; it is either creating or destroying that we find exciting.

ALEXANDER

The kind of person who bores me is the man who won't listen to me when I want to talk to him about myself, and who insists that I must listen to him while he talks to me about himself. No man wants to hear about another man unless he has an inning coming to him. It isn't a fair game.

MRS. FLETCHER

I believe we can endure dull people if they are only sincere. It is a pose of any sort that is the most stupid thing in the world.

MRS. VANE

Yes, indeed; there is the woman who pretends not to care about clothes, for instance. So unnaturally unattractive of her. . . . I do like a woman to be womanly. And it always seems to me it must be sour grapes, anyway, especially when I look at the kind of dresses that sort of a woman always wears.

WEBBER

And there is the literary pose. I think persons who go in for that are assuming a weak position; if they are representing intellect they should have, as a first requisite, brains enough to conceal the fact.

MRS. FLETCHER

That is a very easily recognized pose, at any rate; the first thing one notices is a use of conspicuously unusual words to express quite ordinary thoughts, and shortly after that one discovers a love for the minor poets. I don't know what the literary poseuse would do were it not for the minor poets. They supply her with just the proper mixture of diluted decadence.

WEBBER

And they are so very easily imitated! Any lady wishing to express her soul, may have her pick of any number of perfectly good forms, all well fitted to the soul motif.

ALEXANDER

All these high-brow people are tiresome. When they talk so much about their extraordinary thoughts I can never believe they are the real thing; I always suspect 'em and avoid 'em when I can. I would rather go up against a nice commonplace woman who is willing to talk about the everyday things that happen to a man — even if they aren't particularly exciting — than I would to play up to an anaemic soul who goes in for having her Depths stirred by Art. I like to take things as I find 'em. I don't want to make a religion of music — and bar out the light operas, and amusing things like that — or make an intellectual feat of looking at a portrait. I want to take things naturally. May I have another cup of tea, please?

WEBBER

(*Speaking from the heart*) I have come to the depressing conclusion that each season brings its especial crop of bores. There is the golf or the tennis enthusiast who infests the trains in Midsummer. You all know him; he surprises you in the window end of a car seat, blocks your retreat, and insists on telling you all about how he foozled the bunker in the seventeenth, or how he barely managed to return his opponent's lob in a deuce set. It's excessively wearisome.

ALEXANDER

And the Spring of the year always brings out a lot of perfectly bad bores who tell you all about their health — how they don't sleep nights, and how they cure colds, and all that. By Jove, I don't see how the doctors stand it, getting it all the while. It's my idea of nothing to listen to — that sort of thing.

MRS. FLETCHER

In the Spring, too, we first begin to hear about gardens — gardens and birds! I never did find a seed catalogue interesting — either to read or to hear quoted — and as for birds — well — I prefer keeping my opera glasses for their predestined use, rather than getting them out to pry into the private life of a robin!

MRS. VANE

The Winter bore is the one I most dislike — the woman

who talks — always at parties — against going out. Now, I am a very domestic woman, but it's surprising how unattractive family life can be made to appear to me.

ALEXANDER

And in the Fall there is the mother of the débutante; she is the worst of 'em all! (*He sighs with the despair of the eligible bachelor*)

MRS. FLETCHER

Of course, should we really confess, what we all like is to talk about ourselves all the time. And when we find another person who is sufficiently akin to us to share our interest in our sensations, we acclaim him a delightful man. It's very simple.

WEBBER

Yes. It's a case of bore and let bore, apparently.

MRS. VANE

But you hear so much more about it than you used to! I don't see what we are coming to.

MRS. FLETCHER

I don't know about that. There's a quotation, that seems to me to be appropriate, that comes to us from another generation:

"Society is now one polished horde,
Formed of two mighty hosts — the bores and bored!"

XVII

THE HORSE SHOW

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Sinking into a chair at one of the many tables scattered about; she has been, for some time, a suffering guest*) Even the thought of tea is refreshing!

ALEXANDER

(*A believer in society's pastimes, and a man who would never have the impulse to look a gift horse show in the mouth*) The sun was hot out there in the boxes. (*He mops his brow and makes violent signs to a waiter*)

MRS. PARENT

(*A hostess, and one of those unfortunate women in whom the maternal instinct has run riot. She speaks with an injured air*) Did you know that Mr. Edgerton's chestnut took a blue ribbon in the gentleman's roadster class? Do you think it is fair for the same horse to walk off with ribbons both as a gentleman's roadster and as a lady's saddle horse?

ALEXANDER

(*Always a believer in a definite answer*) As long as he doesn't have to be both at the same time he's all right.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*In the sympathetic murmur that becomes a guest*) It does seem a bit like asking him to be a bookcase by day and a folding bed by night!

MRS. PARENT

I should say it did! . . . I think the judges should take into consideration whether a horse is used exclusively for one thing or not. . . . Now, there is our Brown Betty that my Daisy rode. Of course she isn't as good-looking as Mr. Edgerton's chestnut, but the children all love her dearly. She has such a sweet temper, and I think that is so important in a horse.

ALEXANDER

(*Sotto voce*) And in a woman.

MRS. PARENT

(*Oblivious*) And Daisy had a new habit, too.

MRS. VANE

(*Comfortingly*) I noticed that at once, Mrs. Parent; very good-looking — very.

MRS. PARENT

Well, I think that should have helped. It isn't only the horse one looks at when a lady is riding. . . . My Daisy

has such a good seat. Don't you think she has a good seat, Mr. Alexander?

ALEXANDER

(*Absorbed in getting his tea served to his liking, and giving only the remnants of his attention to conversation*) I didn't see where she was sitting, Mrs. Parent.

MRS. PARENT

(*Looking at him sharply, and laughing the unwilling laugh of the woman who is a hostess, and therefore not free to display irritation*) I meant her seat on a horse, Mr. Alexander.

MRS. VANE

(*With sudden piercing interest*) Do look at that gown! Did you ever see anything so perfectly lovely as that skirt? See, she can hardly walk in it — it is so tight.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Languidly observing it*) And that, of course, makes it very desirable. . . . It's that Jeanne Halle model Mme. Marie had in the Spring.

MRS. VANE

No, my dear — you are mistaken. It's a Paquin.

MRS. PARENT

Those sleeves look like Drecol to me.

ALEXANDER

Ripping looking hat.

MRS. PARENT

I believe that my Daisy would look well in a hat like that. That woman is a fright in it. She is too old for it. . . . Now, my Daisy is so fresh looking.

ALEXANDER

(*Glancing towards the circle*) Hello — here comes the four-in-hand class!

MRS. PARENT

Why, so it is. . . . We can see them well enough from here. I shan't stir until my children come on. Mercy! There is that chestnut again! I don't see how they ever got him out of a runabout and into a brake so quickly. . . . How amazingly well that old bay horse of the Wilton's — that they meet the train with every night, in a station wagon — looks as a leader! Their stable must be as empty as a deserted village this afternoon, now they have mustered out four horses — and there can't be a man left in the garden, I'm sure.

ALEXANDER

The little chap on the near side looks as if he might be more at home on the lawn than on the box. What? (*He begins to take a sporting interest*) Easy on the turn, old chap — or you'll shake off the house-man!

"Even the thought of tea is refreshing"

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Plaintively*) How absurd a coach looks these days, and what a pity it is that the romance is gone from it! That old boat down in the Jackson Park lagoon — the reproduction of the one Columbus discovered America in — has as much to do with present conditions as a four-in-hand has. They are both interesting relics, and that is all. . . . And yet — do you remember how exciting it used to be to sit on the box seat, with four beautiful creatures down in front of you — and what a thrill the sound of the horn used to give you when it rose over a winding country road?

ALEXANDER

Forty-horse-power motors have taken the importance away from a four-horse-power coach, and a siren on the exhaust makes a horn sound like the whistle on a peanut wagon.

MRS. VANE

Anything that is out of fashion is insignificant.

MRS. FLETCHER

Times have changed, and — in spite of Mr. Kipling and his school that finds romance in bolts and buzz saws — I believe that adventure belongs to the past. Nowadays only the criminal classes have it; they are the only ones who ever run any risks. The rest of us are so wrapped in safeguards and comforts that there is no opportunity left us

to imperil anything except our peace of mind; that, it follows quite naturally, is a hazard we moderns delight in. . . . Possibly if we had lived three or four generations ago we should not have consciously enjoyed our times. . . . I dare say that Londoners took posting quite as calmly as we Chicagoans take the Twentieth Century Limited. . . . The good old days of eloping to Gretna Green behind your straining horses are gone — and something vigorous and valorous has gone with them.

MRS. VANE

(*Comfortably, as one counting her blessings*) Well, romance is gone, too.

MRS. FLETCHER

I don't know about that; in the future — the future! That is always romantic!

MRS. VANE

My dear, you only think so because it's uncertain.

ALEXANDER

If uncertainty does it, the marriage of the future will be much more exciting than that of the past. . . . I suppose the time is coming when the contracting parties will start off for St. Joe in an aeroplane.

MRS. VANE

(*Peering through the crowd about her*) What an extraordinary coat Mrs. Wood is wearing! . . . She

really should diet. . . . There is Mrs. Morely; how pretty she is in her mourning! It always seems a real pity to me, that if a husband loves his wife, he can never have the pleasure of seeing her in a widow's veil; it is always so very becoming.

MRS. FLETCHER

Considering that mourning was first contrived as a protection, with the hope of making one inconspicuous, I must say that it serves, these days, as an excellent example of the perversion of an idea.

MRS. VANE

But my dear, who wants to be protected? Surely a widow doesn't — not at a horse show.

ALEXANDER

(*Looking hopelessly about him, and speaking from the heart*) Children must be tremendously fond of horses! . . . I have never seen so many in my life as I have here this afternoon. . . . The place is infested with 'em; it's like an orphan asylum! . . . It's a shame for Roosevelt to miss it; it would make him believe that the country isn't going to the dogs; I believe it might even make him take the stump for race suicide!

MRS. PARENT

(*With a sudden ecstasy of excitement*) Do see what is coming now! (*She leaps to her feet*) Mrs. Fletcher, you

mustn't miss this! Never mind your tea. . . . See, Mrs. Vane, it's the pony class, and my twins are riding in it. . . . That is Eddie on the black pony and little Elly on the spotted one. Isn't she sweet, Mr. Alexander? Just see her curls bob! . . . Mercy! That pony of the Anders' is too big for the class! Why, he's a regular Percheron! . . . They might as well enter Mr. Edgerton's chestnut, and be done with it! . . . I don't think it is fair to have a great boy like that competing with mere babies like Eddie and Elly. I shouldn't think he would want to — with such a good pony, too. . . . Well, we must go back to the box, or we shall miss some of this. . . . Do hurry.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Reluctantly placing her cup on the table, and preparing to go out into the sun again. To* Mr. Alexander) What a strenuous thing the maternal instinct seems to be, and how much I should like to finish my tea! (*They leave the shelter of the pavilion, and join the throng of well dressed, pleasure-harassed people flocking up and down before the line of boxes*)

XVIII

MEMORIAL DAY

ALEXANDER

(*The sort of person who eats, drinks, and does his hampered best to be merry, — not because he thinks of dying to-morrow, but because he lives to-day.*) I suppose you will be leaving town soon, Mrs. Fletcher?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Who is sufficiently weary of her environment to fancy that anything different from it should be an improvement.*) I think so, — and yet the same old summer life does not appeal to me particularly.

MRS. VANE

(*A comfort-loving woman, who is quite contentedly absorbed in externals.*) I went to the country for Memorial Day. We motored out on Saturday, eight of us in two cars, and stayed there for three days. I think it is very pleasant when the holidays come on a Monday; it makes the week-end so much longer.

ALEXANDER

I spent my Decoration Day sitting on the club piazza — in a fur coat — watching the youngsters play baseball.

MRS. FLETCHER

That has become typical of the amusement of the bachelor upon his holiday, hasn't it?

WEBBER

Yes, the only difference is that some of us are spectators and some performers.

MRS. FLETCHER

That is a distinction that runs through life. . . . I wonder which is the more amusing?

MRS. VANE

I think looking on is very much pleasanter; one can be so ornamental if one doesn't take part in anything.

WEBBER

(*With the scorn of the thinker*) Action is exceedingly unbecoming.

ALEXANDER

And it upsets a man to run about in the sun. There's nothing in baseball — or tennis. They can't touch motoring. Exercise isn't what it is advertised to be.

MRS. FLETCHER

But, Mr. Alexander, neither is sitting on a piazza!

WEBBER

And looking on is only satisfactory when it has been earned by work.

MRS. FLETCHER

Your theory, then, is that it is only while we are getting our breath that we should pause to watch?

WEBBER

That is the great American theory. . . . What is yours?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Leaning forward in her chair, and giving way to the pleasures of discussion*) If you are searching for happiness — never pause at all. Work — hurrying from one definite goal to another definite goal — is the only thing that brings us that — a crude desire, and an occupied life. . . . Of course, if you want something more — understanding and sophistication — you must withdraw yourself and go in for cynicism, and watch the vulgar herd go by. . . . But you won't be happy, if that is your desire.

WEBBER

I suppose that holding one's self remote from life makes for more unhappiness than anything else in the world.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Pensively*) Yes.

WEBBER

And the consciousness of that very thing is, I imagine, the motive power behind the dynamic American we see accomplishing great things. Work is an anodyne.

ALEXANDER

Work's a bore.

MRS. VANE

Work is just a means to an end.

WEBBER

What thorough individualists we all are!

ALEXANDER

Well, a man must help himself before he should be expected to help others.

MRS. VANE

I am sure if we don't think for ourselves no one will think for us.

WEBBER

That is, of course, our national doctrine.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am not so sure. We are very provincial, we city people of the better class; we imagine that everyone in this big country of ours is — or longs to be — just exactly like us.

"They had been their heroes for a generation"

MRS. VANE

(*Complacently*) Why, of course they do!

MRS. FLETCHER

I didn't spend my Memorial Day in a motor, nor at a country club, nor in playing bridge, nor in doing any of those things that have come to mean a holiday to us — to our set. . . . I ran away from my house party, and became a part of the great American people!

WEBBER

How did you accomplish it?

MRS. FLETCHER

I went to the memorial services in the village, all by myself.

MRS. VANE

What an odd thing to have done, my dear!

ALEXANDER

It must have been a stupid house party.

WEBBER

Tell us about it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well — in the first place, the bandstand in the little village park was draped with red, white and blue. Not

too much of it — just enough to symbolize, and not enough to make it seem common. . . . And wooden benches had been put around it, and the local band played "Yankee Doodle" and "The Star Spangled Banner" — very badly, but very ardently. . . . And the school children — clean, lean, brown-faced American children — marched in, each one carrying a flag. . . . And the farmers from all about came to town in their buggies — a whole family in each one — and their horses were all tied around the square, except in one corner, where the local popcorn man had established a yellow wagon, and was selling lemonade and "sassprilla" pop.

ALEXANDER

I can't see why it is more patriotic to drink soft drinks at a wagon than hard ones at a club; it's beyond me.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, I have never seen anything more democratic than that wagon!

WEBBER

If golden-rod is to be our national flower, I am sure that popcorn should be our national food!

MRS. FLETCHER

And after everyone was seated, the veterans marched in. They were old, and bent, and feeble, and their blue

coats hung loose on them, and every person in the crowd knew and respected them; they had been their heroes for a generation!

WEBBER

The veterans are the most picturesque thing we have in this country.

MRS. FLETCHER

They are more than that! . . . . To those children, standing there with their hats off and their flags in their hands, they meant altruism, and personal sacrifice, and forgetfulness of self-interest. . . . The president of the bank was there on the platform, and the editor of the town paper, and the minister, and a judge from the county seat — but they were nowhere at all in importance beside those old men who had stood for something bigger than individual aggrandizement.

ALEXANDER

The president of the bank and a judge! You're putting your old soldiers pretty high, if you rank 'em above that. Money and the power to issue injunctions ought to count for something!

WEBBER

Should they count for more than sentiment, do you think?

MRS. VANE

Sentiment is all very well, as a luxury — but of course no one pretends it is a necessity — like money and justice.

MRS. FLETCHER

But the Grand Army of the Republic is not a sentiment. It is the strong tangible thing that did its work and saved the country. . . . I realized, when I sat there, an alien in French clothes, and looked at those few survivors — that they were the real Americans, and that that homely country crowd about me was made up of men of the same stuff, and that we urban people, with our intimate touch with Europe, and our amusements, and our consciously aristocratic viewpoint — were just nothing at all but froth!

ALEXANDER

What nonsense! It is the city man who pays, and the man who pays is the main guy.

MRS. VANE

And I am sure no good American is ashamed of being in touch with Europe; on the contrary, we are all proud of it.

WEBBER

Those old men responded to the call of a voice that is dead. The only thing that arouses the youth of the pres-

ent generation is a threat to his pocketbook — not to his liberty.

ALEXANDER

Sometimes too much attention to one deprives him of the other. Leavenworth is full of careless men like that.

MRS. FLETCHER

I wonder if you are right, Mr. Webber. . . . They didn't impress me so — those clear-eyed men and women. . . . It isn't fair to judge a nation by those people who live under its worst conditions — in crowds — without fresh air — without horizons. I believe that there is an American whom we don't understand — we people who play with life. He is too simple for us to comprehend, but he is there, and waiting, in case he should be needed. It may be sentimentalism, that feeling — but I am glad I have it. I would rather believe in that than in money.

XIX

COUNTRY LIFE

WEBBER

(*Settling into his chair with a long sigh of contentment*) I am delighted to have been able to catch the early train! You have no idea how pleasant it is to sit here so serenely. You can't possibly imagine the impression the restfulness of the country makes on a man when he has just come from the turmoil of the town.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Doubtfully*) I suppose it does seem restful.

WEBBER

Restful! Don't you know that this perfect quiet — those long, still shadows on the grass — that faint, sweet odor from the flower garden, make it seem almost as tranquil as the Garden of Eden?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Sighing*) I wonder if the Garden of Eden was really restful? Of course, Adam probably did not demand all the modern conveniences — it is the attempt to live a city life in the country that makes things arduous — but I

imagine Eve had her hands full, all the same. I believe she ate the apple in deliberate pursuit of the simple life; that she wanted to leave her complicated garden. One always feels that joy is to be had just outside the gates. That is woman's nature.

WEBBER

But surely nothing disturbs you here? I always think, as we sit having our tea, that this is the one peaceful spot I know.

MRS. FLETCHER

But peace is like every desirable goal; it is to be won only by the most laborious effort. How do you take your tea?

WEBBER

Lemon, please.

MRS. FLETCHER

Lemon? — Where is the lemon? — Hilda must have forgotten it. Will you please ring the bell. (*Webber does so, and after a moment* HILDA, *a conventional waitress, enters*)

MRS. FLETCHER

Hilda, will you bring me some lemon, please?

HILDA

There are no lemons in the house, madam.

MRS. FLETCHER

No lemons?

HILDA

No, madam. They forgot to send them from the grocery, and when I telephoned they said there would be no delivery, now, until to-morrow morning.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Resignedly*) Very well, send the motor for them.

HILDA

The motor has gone to the station, madam, to meet Mrs. Vane.

MRS. FLETCHER

Of course; I had forgotten. And the train is sure to be late. It always is. Well, send James in the runabout.

HILDA

James has gone to the village, madam, to get some cream for the cook. The cows are not giving much milk now, and she hadn't enough. It's the season, the dairyman says; everything is so dry.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, telephone and try to catch James at the creamery, and ask him to stop at the grocery. (HILDA *goes toward*

"I suppose it does seem restful"

exit) Oh, yes, and tell him to call at the express office, too, and see if the fruit has come.

HILDA

Very good, madam. (*Exit* HILDA)

WEBBER

(*Cheerfully*) I prefer it without lemon — really.

MRS. FLETCHER

It's a wise man who prefers what he can get. (*She gives him his cup*)

WEBBER

Are you reading Wells's serial, "The New Machiavelli," in the English Review?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Flinging herself with eagerness into a non-utilitarian conversation*) Yes, it promises to be more important than anything he has done since "Tono-Bungay," don't you think so?

WEBBER

I like it, so far. You can't be sure with a serial, however; in this life anything one may not see the end of has a certain fictitious value. (*Re-enter* HILDA)

HILDA

I beg your pardon, madam, but Mrs. Vane has just

telephoned from the station to say that her trunk did not come on the same train with her, and what shall she do about it?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Wearily*) Tell her to come on without it and see that the express wagon meets the next train — at 6:10. James will be back in time to go, I hope. And Hilda — tell him to stop at the Buck's farm on the way to the station and see if they can let us have some eggs. (*To* WEBBER, *with a worried look*) I don't know what is the matter with the hens this year. They don't seem to lay at all.

WEBBER

(*Abstractedly*) Too bad. . . . Did you know that Stock was leading at Ravinia Park this month?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Automatically making the conventional response*) It is so wonderful having the concerts out-of-doors! It is the perfect atmosphere for music. (*Enter* JENKINS, *a self-respecting gardener, in a state of evident irritation*)

JENKINS

Might I speak to you, ma'am?

MRS. FLETCHER

What is it, Jenkins?

JENKINS

The cook says she must have lettuce, ma'am.

MRS. FLETCHER

Of course she must have lettuce, Jenkins. (*To* WEBBER, *in a nervous attempt at humor*) Imagine a cook without lettuce! Why shouldn't she have it, Jenkins? Why do you come to me about it?

JENKINS

There is none in the garden, ma'am.

MRS. FLETCHER

No lettuce?

JENKINS

No, ma'am. You see, the season is so dry. It's all gone to seed, but I brought in some very good beets — and the carrots are fine this year. (*He pauses, to reflect complacently*) Yes, ma'am, it's a fine year for carrots.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With the patience one shows a valuable servant*) You will have to send some one to the village for what the cook wants. Let me see — send the chore boy, on his bicycle. (*Exit* JENKINS, *mysteriously conveying, in his silence, the impression that he is being sided against*)

MRS. FLETCHER

What were we talking about?

WEBBER

(*Blankly*) I am sure I don't know. There are some interesting portraits at the Art Institute this week — Spanish.

MRS. FLETCHER

Portraits are always interesting when you don't know the subjects — and always disappointing when you do. It is very hard on the painters; we expect them to paint people we are fond of — not as they look, but as we think they look — and naturally affection glorifies. We are asking the artist to reproduce something he has never seen.

WEBBER

These are lovely, shadowy things —— (*Re-enter* HILDA)

HILDA

I beg your pardon, madam, but the laundress says the rain water is very brown — it's been so long since we have had any rain — and will you please attend to it.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Distractedly*) Tell her, Hilda, that I prefer it that way. (*Exit* HILDA, *with the air of one who has been trifled with*)

MRS. FLETCHER

(*In desperation*) Is it your idea, Mr. Webber, that suffrage would take women from their homes?

WEBBER

I don't see how it can fail to have that effect. (*He shakes his head with the reluctance of one who wishes to be advanced, and testifies only on compulsion*)

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Firmly*) Then I am for it! I realize that my sex needs it! (*Re-enter* JENKINS)

JENKINS

Might I speak to you, ma'am?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*As one expecting the worst*) What *is* it, Jenkins?

JENKINS

(*Happily*) Tne pump is broke, ma'am.

MRS. FLETCHER

What pump?

JENKINS

(*With pleased importance*) The pump on the well, ma'am. There will be no water for Sunday if I don't

get it fixed — none for the house, even — let alone the garden.

MRS. FLETCHER

Good gracious! There's a big party coming up for Sunday. Mr. Webber, do you know anything about gasoline pumps?

WEBBER

(*Decidedly*) I do not.

MRS. FLETCHER

Well, Jenkins, send to the village at once and get some one. There must be some one there who understands a simple thing like a gasoline pump. Tell him it's a matter of life or death!

JENKINS

There's no one to send, ma'am. The chauffeur's off somewhere, and the coachman's running errands for the cook —

MRS. FLETCHER

Yes, I know. Go yourself, Jenkins. Take my riding horse, and go. (*Exit* JENKINS)

MRS. FLETCHER

You were about to say?

WEBBER

Was I?

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Looking at him with twinkling eyes*) Tell me something more about the peace and rest of country life.

WEBBER

(*Reluctantly laughing with her*) Is it always like this?

MRS. FLETCHER

No, indeed. You came on an early train; the curtain wasn't up; I imagine now everything that can happen has happened, so let us have some more tea — and we may discuss the musical glasses amid all the stimulus of rural quiet.

XX

THE FIRST ROBIN

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Whose attitude towards affairs is sufficiently serious and towards herself sufficiently light, to insure her being a good companion.*) Let me give you some more tea, Mr. Alexander.

ALEXANDER

(*Who is to be counted upon to be well turned out, and almost always to find it easier to be good-humored than not.*) Thanks.

WEBBER

(*A man of unimpeachable tastes, and a believer in the feminine influence.*) And takes away his exercise. (*He definitely places his cup on the table*) What are we coming to?

MRS. FLETCHER

Apparently not the vanishing point, at any rate.

MRS. VANE

(*With an air of one improving on mere Nature*) But everyone who motors goes to such very good tailors, and that makes more difference than anything — don't you

think so? — And then, of course, there's always dear Carlsbad.

MRS. FLETCHER

The last resort of the pursuer of pleasure!

ALEXANDER

And not much of a resort, at that!

MRS. FLETCHER

If you take to making jokes, Mr. Alexander, Mr. Webber will put them in his new play.

WEBBER

Don't worry, Alexander. If you take to making jokes you will ruin your type, and be of no use to me.

MRS. VANE

I like people to be very typical. It is so very easy to understand them when they are. You know just where to place them. (*Enter* MRS. CARLTON)

MRS. CARLTON

(*Advancing and shaking hands rapidly, with the air of one who never misses a train*) How do you do, everyone? How nice to find you all here! . . . Of course, that is one thing in favor of the city; it is dirty and noisy, and

there is no home life, but you do see your friends. I will confess that I sometimes think of it, but when I look out of the window, and see the clean snow, and the babies playing in it, and our new shrubs all doing so nicely, I realize that we have our simple pleasures, too.

MRS. FLETCHER

Tea, Mrs. Carlton?

MRS. CARLTON

No, thank you. I find that it keeps me awake, unless I take it regularly, and I assure you that keeping house in the country in Winter is difficult enough, without demanding tea every afternoon.

ALEXANDER

(*Jovially*) It would take more than tea to keep me awake in the country!

WEBBER

Try the 7:37 train for a few mornings, and then see how you feel about sleep, Alexander! You don't know the meaning of the word.

MRS. FLETCHER

"What can they know of England, who only England know?" Do have some cake, anyway, Mrs. Carlton.

MRS. CARLTON

I will take that. (*She does so*) You would never guess what I saw this morning! (*She glances about her with the bright, fostering air of one who has been too intimately in touch with kindergartening methods*) The first robin! The dear little thing was right under the dining-room windows! The children threw crumbs to him; my little ones love nature. . . . Willy tried to catch him under his cap — he wanted to put him in the cage with the canary — the dear child has been told that if he did they would fight — and he is *so* scientific — but the robin was too quick for him. Later on he will be more tame; the little wild things soon grow to know their friends!

MRS. VANE

(*With animation*) And I saw all the new Spring models! I went to Mme. Marie's opening, and I will say that I have never beheld such queer clothes in my life! . . . The French are so very inconsiderate; they never seem to have anyone over twenty-five in mind when they plan the fashions. I said to Mme. Marie — "It's really dreadful to be forced to buy such things. Think how I shall look in them!" . . . But you know what a French woman is like; she made me feel that a bag tied tightly about my knees was what I had been waiting all my life to wear. . . . Everyone was there; it was much more representative than the Lenten Sewing Circle.

WEBBER

I passed a hand-organ as I came along the street, with some children dancing around it — and the balloon man was standing on your corner, with his great, blooming bunch over his shoulder. I felt the first thrill of Spring.

ALEXANDER

Well, this morning, I went to look at a new model, myself.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Offering him the cake*) Hat or coat?

ALEXANDER

(*With the solemnity due to so serious a topic*) Neither. It was a new motor — a 1911 six-cylinder, and they can deliver it next month, so I shall have it before the Summer.

MRS. FLETCHER

It sounds almost like strawberries in January!

MRS. CARLTON

Ours never come until July, and sometimes we are impatient — but when we do get them they are so much better than any others that we are repaid for the waiting. You know that feeling one has about one's own garden!

WEBBER

Yes, indeed. The mere maternal instinct pales beside it!

MRS. VANE

(*Enthusiastically pouncing upon a grievance*) Gardens are very provoking, are they not? Just at the time when you don't want to bother, your man insists on your deciding about very uninteresting bulbs and seeds and things — and invariably when you want the miserable things they are not ready. . . . I should like to keep my garden a full month ahead of my neighbors' — I don't care to get tomatoes and cucumbers when everyone else is having them — but I can't seem to make my gardener understand.

ALEXANDER

(*Dreamily*) It's a queer thing about this time of the year; the new things to eat are so tempting. . . . Even the same old club menu seems different, somehow.

MRS. FLETCHER

"In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to" — soft shell crabs — doesn't it, Mr. Alexander?

ALEXANDER

Yes — and Little Necks, and things you haven't had all Winter.

MRS. CARLTON

I think that nothing all the year is so exciting as the first asparagus!

ALEXANDER

(*Turning to her with a sudden attention, as to a fellow connoisseur*) Do you like it better with drawn butter or with Hollandaise sauce?

WEBBER

I have an idea that you and Mrs. Carlton are illustrating supply and demand, Alexander.

MRS. VANE

Speaking of demand — do you think it is possible that we are going to be forced into wearing hats that make us look like barnyard fowls? The papers all say that "Chantecler" is still having that effect. . . . I wish the Audubon Society would take it up; I can't imagine anything more unbecoming.

ALEXANDER

If the Audubon Society'd go in for practical things like that, I'd subscribe to 'em myself!

MRS. VANE

I should think that a man like Rostand, who every one says is so clever, would think of such things before he

writes a play. . . . I suppose he has no public spirit. He's probably all temperament, and always leaps before he looks.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am sure if he ever looked at a lady impersonating a speckled hen he would never have been willing to assume the responsibility — not even for everlasting fame!

MRS. CARLTON

(*Taking up the conversation as it touches her*) Our eldest boy has developed a most interesting bent for hens. He supplies us with all our eggs — and you know what that has meant, this Winter. We pay him twice what the market asks for them, because I think a taste for simple country life — for farming — is so valuable to this generation.

ALEXANDER

(*Turning a restless eye upon* MRS. CARLTON, *and resolutely changing the subject*) I am thinking of going out to Pasadena for a few weeks. I like Pasadena. A man can count on the climate there, and on oiled roads for motoring, and the club's all right, and there's no trouble about picking up a fourth hand for bridge. It's about as good as any place I know.

MRS. VANE

I must say that I think no place in this country is as

attractive in the Spring as Atlantic City. The women are so very well dressed, and the shops are so very tempting!

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Recklessly pouring hot water into her tea pot*) Pasadena — and Atlantic City — and the suburbs — and the city streets! We know them all pretty well, do we not? . . . And yet, I suppose some place where we never think of going, the snow is melting on the high hills, and the streams are running full, and there is a Spring smell in the air —

ALEXANDER

That doesn't sound good to me. My idea of a place to stay away from is one where the snow is melting. A man wouldn't be well taken care of, and there would be nothing to do.

MRS. FLETCHER

I dare say. — At any rate — here I am — and now that I am here, can't I give some one another cup of tea?

XXI

SOCIALISM

MRS. FLETCHER

(*Settling back into her chair, and gently agitating her fan*) I am so sorry for the poor, these days.

ALEXANDER

(*Comfortably*) Well, I've been held up for subscriptions to the Baby's Out-Door Sanitarium, and the Day Outing and the Ice Distribution Funds, and the Fresh Air Home, and the Free Bathing Pools, and the Park Picnic Association, and I don't know how many others. I'll have to get a charity of my own to protect me; a man without one is at the mercy of all his friends — they know he can't get back at 'em. . . . I've begun to feel that the suffering poor are getting more done for 'em than the rich. No one (*with an injured air*) is concerning himself whether I get into the country or not!

MRS. VANE

(*Easily*) I don't believe that there are any suffering poor any more, now that the charities are so busy. At any rate, I am sure there is no necessity for it. They have only themselves to thank if they do suffer.

MRS. FLETCHER

(*With a look of sudden compunction*) The Socialists don't agree with you there, Mother.

MRS. VANE

(*With a snort of derision*) The Socialists! What do I care what those anarchistic creatures say, going about trying to stir up discontent in people who are a thousand times better off than they were in the wretched places they came from? They are just trying to make trouble! I say, let them go back again if they don't like the way we run things in our country.

WEBBER

But you forget that "our" country is their country, too — and that in a few years they have as much to say about how it shall be run as we have.

ALEXANDER

(*Portentously*) The time is coming when we shall have to change all that. This agitation about giving the poor man his share is a dangerous thing; it may bring on the worst kind of a panic, one of these days. . . . I tell you the big men won't stand for it! They'll drop the bottom out of the stock market, the first thing we know, and close up the mills and the works and let the poor man go without his wages for a while. There's always that way left to show him who's who.

MRS. FLETCHER

Unless he takes that very opportunity to show us what's what.

WEBBER

"Big business" is beginning to have a wholesome consideration for the average voter; if he should ever reach the point where he knows his own strength it would be like a sixty-horse-power motor running away with you, Alexander. My!

ALEXANDER

(*Gloomily*) If that happened the result would be a smash.

MRS. VANE

Well, I should think so! I never heard anything so absurd! I don't consider the average voter at all representative.

MRS. FLETCHER

I am afraid he might not represent us, Mother. . . . What could the average voter do, Mr. Webber, if he did wake up?

WEBBER

Well, of course the Socialists claim that he could give the laboring man a larger share of the returns of his labor, as a starter — and that in time he could give to the community — and not to the capitalist — the ownership of land, and of materials, and of resources.

MRS. VANE

I think it is a great mistake to encourage the Socialists by taking them seriously! If we don't take a stand against them, who will, I should like to know?

ALEXANDER

(*Flushing resentfully*) A lot of long-haired, crazy enthusiasts! I'd like to see what would happen to a good property if they did get hold of it.

MRS. FLETCHER

Do you think that under the present system a good property is run more scrupulously?

ALEXANDER

(*Patiently*) Of course a woman can't be expected to understand things like that.

MRS. VANE

(*Broodingly*) Socialists indeed! Common people like that! What can they know? All they want is to take things away from people who have always had them, and give them to people who never have.

MRS. FLETCHER

That seems reasonable.

MRS. VANE

Besides, I never can believe that they are sincere. Why,

you see Socialists with automobiles, these days — and the last time I went to New York there was one on the Twentieth Century! I didn't feel safe for a moment, for fear he would throw a bomb, or something. . . . Why don't they practise what they preach? Why don't they give all their own money to the poor, and see how they like it?

WEBBER

(*Smiling*) That's philanthropy — not Socialism.

MRS. VANE

Of course it is Socialism, Mr. Webber. Don't you think I know? They want everyone to share everything — and how long do you suppose it would be before a few clever men had it all in their hands again? It would just be the same thing all over.

ALEXANDER

(*With firm vagueness*) You must draw the line somewhere, Webber.

MRS. VANE

And just see what they want to do to family life! It's atrocious even to think of it! Imagine little children being taken from their mothers and sent off to some institution somewhere! It's enough to cure any Socialist with a heart, just to serve on an Orphan Asylum board for a time. . . . Their own homes are so much better for them!

(*She glances about the ample terrace, and over the wide, empty lawn, sighing, the while, with ready sentimentality*)

MRS. FLETCHER

But as things are, Mother, so many of the children from the best home surroundings are sent to boarding schools, that it is largely those who have no advantages who would be affected by that change, even if it were attempted.

MRS. VANE

But, my dear, we women of the world are so much busier than the women who work! I often envy them, I am sure. . . . And even if we do send our children away to school, we see them in the vacations — and I am sure that is quite enough! I never could understand the necessity of the Summer vacation lasting so long; I think it must be just because the teachers are indolent. . . . But that has nothing to do with the things these Socialists threaten! They want to part everything — property — and mothers and children — and husbands and wives! There is no telling where they would stop, if they once had a chance. . . . Why, they might even make everyone dress alike!

ALEXANDER

(*Thoughtfully*) Of course if a man could count on losing his wife in ten years or so, and on having his family taken off his hands, he wouldn't need so much money, I suppose. . . . And of course, if that was the case, he

wouldn't work for it, but (*triumphantly*) how could you tell if a man was any good or not, unless you could look up his credit?

MRS. VANE

And how could you tell who was the right man for your daughter to marry if there were no such things as bank accounts? Why, a parent would have to go into the question of a suitor's ability in all those common things the Socialists might make him do, and that would be so much more complicated!

WEBBER

I have a feeling that under Socialism we might think too much of physical well-being; that we should be too occupied in being a comfortable race, to be a thinking one.

MRS. VANE

(*With unconscious smugness*) Materialism is so disgusting! I think things had better stay as they are, in the hands of those who know how to manage them.

WEBBER

I am afraid that we should have no great work of art of any kind; only individualism produces that. I believe that while we might have less injustice, we should have more stagnation.

ALEXANDER

No one would invent anything new. What would be the use of it, with nothing in it for anyone?

MRS. FLETCHER

Is money as important as all that, I wonder? Is art only produced for the reward of the patron? Doesn't it stand to reason that under glad and free conditions we should develop greater and more glorious arts? In uplifting so many people the Socialist feels, I suppose, that he would give the opportunity to become artists to those who might otherwise never have aspired to such a thing — and art has always come from the people. It must have its roots in the soil.

ALEXANDER

(*With a disgusted air*) It seems as if a man were never safe from all this foolish talk of Socialism! Why, I hear it even at the club! It's all very well for the downtrodden to advocate it — and natural enough, too — but when you hear it discussed in drawing-rooms, I'd like to know where we are drifting, and who is going to take a stand against it! (*He settles himself into his chair with the air of one who is ready and willing to support the established order of things. Unconsciously he shifts the cushions at his back, so that perfect comfort may be his*)

MRS. FLETCHER

It's a question whether, if we did take a stand against it, we wouldn't simply be swept away. . . . Life isn't all champagne and truffles, thank Heaven — by far the greater part of it is beer and skittles!