

MRS. MATHER

SOPHIE KERR

IT WAS a fine morning and Mrs. Mather had a great deal to do. First she must make the rounds of certain pay-telephone stations where no attendants or other tire-some people were likely to be near, and slip a quick finger into each coin-return box. Sometimes, indeed, far more often than you'd think, hurried folk made a call, didn't get their party, and didn't wait for their money back. One day Mrs. Mather had found thirty cents, but that was a gala event. Generally a nickel or a dime was all her booty, but these were frequent enough to be worth while.

By the time Mrs. Mather had finished with the pay-telephones the grocer and butcher boys would be making their rounds in the residence streets, and, as the stupidest person knows, many such boys have carts filled with the orders for delivery, each in a box or a package. Now, while such a boy is taking an order into a house, the cart stands unattended, and if you are casual in manner and careful in action you can usually pick up something, an orange, an apple, a couple of bananas—Mrs. Mather was fond of fruit—an onion and a few potatoes or tomatoes, a dinner roll, even a chop or a link of sausage sometimes. Never take large unruly articles, such as bunches of celery, or a steak,

or a roast, however much your mouth may water for such delicacies, because if you do inquiry will be made at the store, and the cop on the beat will be notified. Little pilferings are not missed; most cooks do not check up their orders, and if there should be a bit of a shortage it is set down to carelessness on the part of the order-clerk.

In Mrs. Mather's decent black skirt, made long and full as befitted her age and respectable expression, there was a slit which effected entrance to a pouch pocket as big as a flour-sack. This slit was strategically placed to come under Mrs. Mather's decent black shawl. There were few days indeed in Mrs. Mather's life when her pouch pocket came home empty, though the shameful practice of many grocers and butchers of putting strong iron network over their delivery-carts was not helpful to filling it. Trust and honor, and belief in one's fellow-creatures, reflected Mrs. Mather, observing these safeguards, are rapidly leaving this world. Happily, the carelessness of delivery-boys admits of no known remedy, and just as often as not, perhaps oftener than not, they left the iron network tilted open when they ran into the back doors of the big apartment-houses, or the basements of fine residences.

Mrs. Mather did not know whether to be sorry for the passing of the fine residences and the building of big apartments or not. There was a decided pro and con to it, as she saw it. Apartment-house dwellers bought small orders from small markets whose owners were far more likely to use hand-carts than motors for delivery. That was pro. But the old residences had a grand manner, an aristocratic feeling of conservatism, long established, invulnerable. Mrs. Mather was a conservative, and in her way, an aristocrat, so that she felt at one with the owners of these haughty old brownstone fronts. That was con. Besides, the servants in these old houses were liberal and kind when an old white-haired woman rang the basement bell and quaveringly asked for a cup of coffee and a slice of bread and may the God of the starving reward ye fer y'r ginerosity. That was con too. Many a savory half-chicken or hunk of ham, leftovers of pies and puddings and cakes, many a dish of elegant soup and grand coffee had been acquired by Mrs. Mather in this way. Coffee! The only thing she whole-heartedly envied the rich was their coffee.

In her meditations on this world Mrs. Mather included many concerning the rich. She was intensely curious about them. Their houses had so many rooms, the ceilings were so high, the curtains so fine. Looking into basement windows she could see many maids at work, maids who wore dresses quite good enough for church, who washed and ironed with machinery, or who mixed rich complicated foods on clean white tables, and later cooked them on stoves eight feet long. The kitchens, the

laundries, the servants' dining-rooms—into all these Mrs. Mather peered, at dusk when lights were lit and carelessness had forgotten the curtains. And all this cleanliness and order and paraphernalia, which were seemingly concerned only with the (to Mrs. Mather) exceedingly primitive arts of washing and eating, fired her with wonder as to the beings for whose ultimate good it must be intended. What shiny tables and chairs and chests they must have, and painted pictures in gold frames, maybe solid gold, and china plates with flowers on, and carpets to sink your tired old feet into, and soft beds, too, with blankets white as the foam on a tub of suds, silver spoons for supping up their coffee—and plenty of servants to order round, quick and sharp to do this and do that. A splendid life. Only, somehow, it seemed to have no *bite* in it! No tang of matching wits, no savor of artful conniving and clever apt pulling the wool over people's eyes to charm the pence from their pockets. Mrs. Mather had done this so long and so well, she had developed a quite natural pride in her resourcefulness.

There were so many good ways! Stand on a street-corner, in a swell part of the city where there were not too many passers, and hold a slip of paper in your hand with an address, oh, many blocks away, written on it. Look bewildered and scared, shrink timidly toward a lady or a gentleman and in a sad old voice, tuned to pathos, offer the slip, and will they in their kindness of heart tell you how to get there, for you've seemingly walked the town over. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the lady or the

gentleman gives you a quarter for car-fare. The hundredth person knows that game and tells you to ask a policeman.

And if you want to go somewhere, get on the street-car, and you've lost your purse! Oh, woe and misery! It had thirty cents in it (don't make the sum too high) and your handkerchief and a blessed prayer, and the picture of your darling boy who was kilt in the war, and what are you to do, for you're an old woman and poor, and there's half a day's work waiting for you if you can but get to the place. If the car is not too crowded you'll collect fifty cents to a dollar in small change by this story, and sympathy besides, and go to wherever you want to go at the expense of the conductor.

Mrs. Mather would have scorned to do anything so crude as walk the streets with a piece of raw turnip in her hand, as one of her neighbors did, squeezing out tears and saying it was all she'd had to eat the day! That was plain dumb, especially as the woman was a big fat lummoX who'd clearly never starved herself an hour! No—but if you strolled in the park and saw a young mother out with her baby, and you stopped and said if you ever saw a child marked for good fortune it was this one, and went on and told of grand things to come for the brat, you mostly won a piece of silver. If it was a nurse-maid, now, with the child, tell her fortune, and don't bother about the little one.

Yes, Mrs. Mather enjoyed making her living, and a rainy day was a real cross to her, for it made her stay in the dingy little room which she called her home. She liked it well enough at night, for then she could light the

gas and be cozy with a cup of coffee and the evening picture paper all full of lovely scandals, but in daytime it was too dark, too circumscribed to suit her. She had little domesticity in her make-up. Out in the street for her, where there was something to see, something to do.

She had a regular route—several of them, in fact—for it was foolish to let any one set of people get too familiar with your appearance, but it was her weakness that all of these routes converged at one particular house, a beautiful stately mansion dating from Mrs. Mather's earliest recollections, a house which was her passion and delight. It was through the basement windows of this house that she liked most to watch the servants at work. And she often stood and stared into the upper stories, so bedraped and becurtained, and speculated on the life above stairs. It was, in fact, her ideal home for the rich! And it was the house where the coffee was most superlative in quality of all the places she knew, though she had tasted it but once. Some queer quirk of feeling kept her from asking again. She often imagined herself living in that house, and, of course, when you live in a house you don't ask for victuals at that house's basement door.

In the summer-time, when the residents were away and the place was boarded up, Mrs. Mather used to come of a summer evening and perch on the steps and fan herself, and think of walking up and entering the great front door, and taking off her bonnet and going into the parlor and sitting in the fine chairs they must have there, red satin or maybe

red velvet, as soft and as smooth! And a servant-girl would come, and you'd say, "Bring me my coffee!" and she'd fetch you a pink cup on a silver tray and cream too thick to pour, and sugar lumps in a silver dish, and a white linen napkin to lay in your lap—eh, my dear, that'd be the way to live in a house like this one! Just when she was enjoying herself so well, along would come the mean policeman with the fat stomach and order her off. Mrs. Mather hated that policeman. She often wished for him the curse of boils.

But in spite of the policeman's interference, Mrs. Mather dreamed her dream many times, until it came to have for her a certain quality of reality; either she had lived there, she thought, or she might live there sometime, she was not sure which. So, one day when she had made her route, with gains accruing of five cents from a pay-telephone, a bunch of grapes and a box of crackers from a market-cart, and a quarter from a sweet young thing to whom she had appealed for guidance with her address-slip—in sum, a pretty fair day's work—Mrs. Mather came out beside her house, and saw something which she had never seen before; namely, the great front door wide open and not a soul in sight! Not even the policeman with the fat stomach.

At the curb stood a florist's delivery-truck, and, as she watched, several men came out of the house and began to lift down huge potted palms and carry them in. And, moved by an inexplicable impulse, Mrs. Mather followed them. Calmly and coolly, as if she had every right to be there,

she marched up the steps, and through those wide grilles of iron over the heaviest of glass, until she stood in the middle of the hallway.

It had walls of some dark polished wood the name of which she did not know, and there were painted pictures with gold frames and a carpet that was soft as moss to her feet, even as she had expected. More, there were figures of people, nearly life-size one of them, standing here and there. Mrs. Mather looked at them with a distinct sense of shock, for that life-size one, if she could believe her own eyes, had on no clothes worth mentioning, which is not the decent way to go about. He was very dark all over, maybe a colored man, she thought, and perhaps a wild African heathen who didn't wear clothes. Having thus dismissed and catalogued a Rodin bronze, she peered into the adjoining rooms.

She was so small, she withdrew so deftly into the shadows, that no one noticed her, though there was much coming and going of the florist's men, and a harassed butler rushed back and forth a couple of times. Mrs. Mather succeeded in seeing a room with a great wreath of flowers on the rug, and more flowers like it on the chair-backs, and, actually, the wood of the chairs was gold like the picture-frames! She was looking at a priceless Aubusson set, had she known it. She thought it very odd and very pretty, but a bit light-colored for everyday use. Mrs. Mather preferred things that didn't show dirt.

Instinct warned her not to linger too long, nor penetrate too far into the first-floor rooms, but her success

so far made her brave. Anyway, what could they do to her even if they did discover her? She hadn't stolen anything, and she would cry, and they'd say, "Poor old thing, she's not right in her head," and turn her out, and that would be all, provided the policeman with the fat stomach wasn't near. People didn't usually do harsh things to crying old women with white hair, as Mrs. Mather knew perfectly. So, with a sort of now-or-never courage, Mrs. Mather flitted up the stairway much like a curious and furtive ghost.

More grand rooms! One of them all full of books, too, and Mrs. Mather thought amazedly, "If they want to keep a book-shop it's queer to have it upstairs in the back of the house with no show-windows." There was a clock twice as high as Mrs. Mather; there were gay china images, and pots of flowers, and sofas with cushions fit for a crowned king to lean against; it was amazing. And then she caught a glimpse into a bedroom, with rosy carpet on the floor and mirrors all about, and furniture even shinier and taller than she had imagined in her wildest fancyings. Even as she leaned and peered some one crossed her line of vision—a tall young girl walked from the window and sat down at the dressing-table. Even as she did so an unseen hand turned on the lights all through the hallways.

Mrs. Mather suddenly felt enormously conspicuous. She glanced down over the baluster rail, and became aware that the florist's men had finished their job, and the front door had been closed behind them. Also the butler and a house-maid were mounting the first flight, with

every appearance of coming straight on to where she stood. She was trapped, sure as fate.

Panic seized her. She turned and pantingly worked her old legs as hard as they would go, padding up the next flight of stairs, down the hallway, and bang into the first open door. It was a bedroom, and no one was there. She shut the door and inclined a keen ear to the key-hole. The two servants came on, passed by. She could hear the butler grumbling: "I haven't got time to direct you, with this party to-night, but you do whatever you see's to be done, and help out wherever you can. To-morrow we'll—"

They were gone; they hadn't seen her, hadn't heard her, hadn't suspected her. Mrs. Mather became her imperturbable self, her courage revived, and so did her sense of humor. She was here, actually, in the house she so doted on. Calmly she approached the window, drew aside the curtains. How changed and lessened was the street as you looked down on it from this height! Was that the corner where she usually turned back home? And was that the policeman with the fat stomach whom she so hated? Yes, even in the late dusk she could tell it was surely that man, and his stomach looked fatter and more menacing than ever, seen from above. Him walking along so cool, swinging his club—what if he knew Mrs. Mather was watching him from this window? She breathed a wicked old chuckle.

She turned to the room. What a place, to be sure! She was loath to believe it, but the walls, now, were covered with silk, pasted on, maybe,

or nailed, she didn't know which. What a waste to put good silk stuff on mere walls! And the ceiling had painted clouds with little naked children in among them! It was a queer house for naked people. Her opinion of the owners went down with this realization. That dark negro man downstairs, and now these little bare creatures up over her head! Mrs. Mather pursed prim lips. Nakedness was not nice, not genteel, either in decoration or out of it. Oh, well, it was getting too dark to see the little rascals anyhow.

They had good furniture, these people—this lot was fair yellow wood with silver handles. There was a yellow silk cover on the bed looped up with rosebuds, and a funny table or stand with a yellow curtain with rosebuds hanging down from it, and a three-cornered looking-glass atop. She threw back the cover and felt eagerly of the blankets—oh, what softness, what downiness! And sheets of linen all lace embroidery the length of the hem! Why, it was good enough for an altar-cloth. "They pamper themselves up," she derided. "They surely do pamper themselves up."

A door ajar led to the bath-room, and into this Mrs. Mather now wandered. It was white and sea-green and silver, and there were sweet soaps and bath-salts and toilet-waters, and many monogrammed towels on glass racks. Mrs. Mather fingered them all, and poured some of the toilet-waters on to the grimy rag she called her hankercher. "Smells like a whole garden of vilets. Yes, sir, they do pamper themselves up."

It was getting too dark to see, and

she did not dare turn on the lights. She went back to the door of the bedroom that led into the hall. Perhaps she might slip out and away now. But, no—there was constant coming and going—"A regular towse," she complained. If she went out into all this press they'd find her at once, and she would be handed over to her enemy, the policeman with the fat stomach.

After a while she got tired standing and straining her ears, and she was hungry, too. Well, there was the box of crackers and the bunch of grapes in her pocket, and she saw no reason why she should starve, even if she was a prisoner. The corner street-light made it possible for her to see her way about, so she settled herself in a cushioned arm-chair—sure enough satin—took off her bonnet and shawl, and enjoyed a light lunch. She was deliciously cozy there, and, to add to her pleasure, music had started below, nice lively tunes with a lilt to them. This was surely a good sort of house to have! If she could just get a cup of coffee now—but for that want must be her master.

Mrs. Mather listened and listened to the music, and her old head nodded and drooped and jerked with weariness. When she had reached that point of fatigue where you don't care what you do, she groped her way over to the bed, dragged back its silk day-cover, took off her shoes, and rolled in, dressed as she was. Oh, the smooth, soft, sweet-smelling sheets, the elegant warm blankets, the down-stuffed, lace-trimmed pillows! Mrs. Mather slept, and snored in time to the music. Now and then she half roused, but not enough to be aware

of where she was; she was too luxuriously comfortable for that. She'd turn over and drowse off again, in perfect peace. It was one grand night.

She was wakened suddenly, and with a terrible cold start by the sense that some one had softly opened the door, entered the room, walked to the bedside, and gone out again, a terrible wakening indeed, with stealthy footsteps just beyond the closed door. Mrs. Mather leaped with extraordinary agility to the floor and stood, shaking, her hand clapped over her mouth to hold in a screech of fear. And then she smelled something—something reassuring, heartening, the aromatic whiff of fresh-made, strong coffee. She sniffed at it greedily, and now she beheld as its source on a table near the bed a breakfast-tray, with silver and fine china and white linen, and, better than all these, an unmistakable array of nourishing edibles. Bacon! Scrambled eggs! Toast! And a muffin! Orange marmalade! Half a grape-fruit! And the *coffee*!

Mrs. Mather did not pause to put on her shoes. She went straight to that tray and fortified herself for whatever might come with a cup of coffee, hardly observing at the moment that it was in a pink cup, that the cream was almost too thick to pour, and that there were lumps of sugar in a silver bowl. When she had drunk this welcome draft, she felt better, more calm, more canny. She drew up a chair and set herself to eat everything on the tray. If the gods had provided manna for her, who was Mrs. Mather to frustrate their omniscient wisdom!

What a breakfast! The girl, now, that made the muffin was a wonder. And the bacon came off the side of a fine hog, it surely did. And the marmalade was like gold to look at, and gold to eat, so sweet and precious! Mrs. Mather's old jaws champed and chumped away happily; she smacked her lips, and wiped them on her hankercher because the napkin was clean, and it would be a shame to dirty it. All through the meal she partook of sips of coffee, and as dessert she had the very last drops in the pot. "The angels themselves drink no better," mused Mrs. Mather.

She did not question how the food had come, though it was very simple. The cook had said to the new house-maid: "Carry up the breakfast-tray to the master's old auntie, will you? She's an early one. It's the room to the front end of the hall, third floor. Take it right in and leave it whether she's asleep or awake." The new house-maid had obediently carried up the tray, but by the time she reached the third floor only remembered that the room was "at the end of the hall." She had entered, seen Mrs. Mather's white locks on the pillow, and left the tray.

Now that Mrs. Mather had eaten and drunk, she knew that her visit must come to an end. She couldn't stay on undiscovered forever, and besides there were the pay-telephones, the grocery-carts, waiting for her. She put on her shoes, her bonnet and shawl, and bade her fair retreat an unwilling farewell. For a moment she thought of taking a silver spoon or two with her, but no—it was too risky. If you're caught as a thief

even your white hair won't get you off. Besides, Mrs. Mather was not a thief, in her own mind, and did not want to be one. She made her living by her wits, and that is very different from stealing, and don't you forget it.

She opened the door; the way was clear. Down the first flight of steps she went, holding her breath for sounds about her. But there were none. The family was sleeping late after the party, and the servants were at breakfast in the basement. Only—as Mrs. Mather reached the head of the lower flight she almost dropped with fear at the sight of the new house-maid coming up. Hardly knowing what she did, she came on down, steadying herself with a hand on the mighty baluster. The girl looked at her with shy curiosity—the master's auntie was a funny old bird, that was plain! But lots of rich people have funny relatives tucked away, she knew, for she'd been in service before.

"Good morning, ma'am," she said respectfully. "Shall I open the door for you, if you're going out?"

Mrs. Mather gulped, but held her head high. "I'd be much obliged," she replied, briefly, and to the point.

So the new house-maid went back and shot the bolts of the great glass and iron grille doors, and held them open, and Mrs. Mather walked out, free and unsuspected. Down the steps she came, slowly, in the manner of a proud lady leaving her own home, trailing her black skirt on the stone steps like a queen's robe, no less. At the foot of the steps she gave herself a little shake. Yes, it was true. She had been living in her house, she had slept there, she had eaten there, and she had drunk there the finest coffee of the world. It was no dream this time.

Mrs. Mather walked on toward one of her regular routes. The policeman with the fat stomach, her sworn enemy, was just coming on duty, and he gave her a severe and searching glance as he passed, swinging his club, but he said no word. Mrs. Mather affected not to notice him. "If he did but know, the big dumb ox, if he did but know!" she murmured. So, to put the last flourish and finial on her great adventure, to round it off and make it perfect in every detail, Mrs. Mather turned and tauntingly, swaggeringly, thumbed her old nose at the fat policeman's back.

OUR NEGLECTED STATE DEPARTMENT

Undermanned, Underpaid, and Undertrained, It Cries Aloud for Reorganization

HENRY KITTREDGE NORTON

PROBABLY no state has ever had a perfect foreign office.

Certainly the United States does not boast one to-day. There are those who would say, and probably do say, that no state could have a worse; but this is not true, for we have had it ourselves. Still, there is a growing conviction that the State Department is at least not all that it should be, and the obvious—and the unjust—thing is to lay all the blame on the holder of the portfolio.

The secretary of state is, and under our theory of government must be, a political appointee. He is the president's adviser on foreign policy, and only a man who has the president's confidence in an extraordinary degree can satisfactorily perform this function. It is the president who has the last word in negotiations with foreign powers, and the secretary must share his attitude and support his aims. The president must be free to select the man who is to render him this service. The weight of influence in foreign policy will vary with the character and influence of the two men. A Wilson will carry the chief burden of our international relations and relegate his secretary to a minor rôle; a Harding will leave so much to his adviser

that the secretary sometimes overshadows the president.

In the days when our national interests were centered on the development of our own territory, and when foreign nations of consequence were "on the other side of the world," our problems of foreign policy were comparatively simple. They were likely to come one at a time and to present fairly clear-cut issues which admitted of prompt decision according to the accepted principles that governed our relations with other nations. An elaborate organization would have been useless. For nearly thirty years Alvey A. Adee, as assistant secretary of state, carried the whole structure of our foreign policy under his hat. And even then he was not overburdened.

Those days have passed. It would take a dozen Adees to perform any such feat to-day. As a people we are vaguely aware that since the World War our influence and prestige have increased greatly, but we have not begun even to sense the actual extent of that increase and what it means to the State Department in added responsibility. We know that our foreign trade has increased, but do we know that it has grown from \$3,900,000,000 in