

The Home

Social Weeds

We all have them in our circle of acquaintances—those people who, in public, present the appearance of being intimates with us. Chance reference to incidents that the listeners may not understand; whispered conferences about nothing; voicing your opinion as if you had delegated to them the authority to speak for you, are joined with frank comments on your appearance and belongings. It is this type of person that is continually throwing you into doubtful relations by repeating half-sentences, telling half-truths, misinterpreting you to your friends and the wider circle of acquaintances. And all this is done with such an appearance of innocence that they almost convince you that they are true. If only they would do something tangible, something that you could grasp firmly in your own mind, that would justify you in dropping them because they were dangerous! Alas! they keep within the pale of endurance, and play upon your credulity each time, and you, at least while in their presence, accept their statement, listen to their misinterpretation, half believing they have repented of the error of their ways, and are truthful at last.

At first the individual discovers them, and after a time the circle, and then their day of power is over. It only shows us how helpless we are—mere straws on the social current. We cannot live our ideals except in our own souls; the dear public must take the reflection that, not our friends, but our acquaintances, hold up. We cannot control the false impression conveyed by these mirrors—some representing us tall and cadaverous, some short and broad to the point of grotesqueness: both caricatures.

The friction comes if we do not accept these misinterpreters as the natural phenomena of untrained morals and manners. They are social weeds whose immortality protects them from being uprooted from the social soil.



The Outsider in the Home

By Margaret E. Sangster

"It seems to be clearly our duty," wrote a friend the other day, "to invite Mrs. — into our home for the winter. John and I have had a good many consultations over it, our little household being so sweet and harmonious, and our children developing so beautifully, that we dread the introduction of a disturbing element, and poor Mrs. — has had such a hard life, it has made her irritable and sharp. We dread it a little, but it does seem so plainly a divine appointment for us that we mean to be cheery about it, and let it make our home the richer."

There spoke the true Christian spirit, the spirit that takes up the cross and straightway hides it under the flowers of meekness and tender love. In my childhood it happened that, at different periods, somebody, distinctly an outsider, became for a while a member of our family. I did not then understand, as I do now, how much these visitations, extending sometimes over many months, added to the cares of my delicate little mother, nor how brave she was in receiving each person, woman or man, belonging to kinsfolk or acquaintance, as it might be, with simple and cordial hospitality. One such temporary inmate, a stranger in the land, friendless and solitary, was taken ill under our roof, died there, and was buried in our family plot, my parents commiserating his loneliness even in death. I remember that we children thought very kindly and tenderly of this man, who had been tethered to us by a tenuous thread of association from over the sea, and were glad that he was not all alone in the cemetery, on windy nights when the rain fell.

Another inmate of our home, one who spent several winters with us, was a droll little maiden lady, a tailoress, who sometimes did her work in her room, and sometimes went out by the day, to make down "father's trousers for little Benjamin" in the home of a neighbor or in some thrifty household where the means were limited and the people above false pride. There would Miss Mary turn and press and retrim with buttons and braid father's own top-coat—a heavy piece of work, to be tackled only by valiant and capable hands—or, if need were, put quilts in the frame, or something else that was to be done.

I possess two much-prized mementos of this little lady. One is her tailor's press-board, narrow at one end and broad at the other, smooth with use and dark with age. The other hangs on my bedroom wall, a piece of worsted work, wrought by my own little childish hands under her supervision, an accomplished fact at last, of which we were both very proud, and which the girls of to-day laugh at very merrily when they survey it now.

This friend married from our house, and her wedding was the first I ever attended. She wore a gown of changeable silk, and looked very splendid. Only a few years ago, in her widowhood and ripe old age, she passed away; but as long as she lived she came and went in my home as she had in my mother's, at her own will, and always welcome.

Another and less agreeable outsider who spent a year in my girlhood's home was a remote connection who had outlived all her own people, and drifted at seventy into the safe harbor of our domicile. Fretful, crotchety, perverse beyond belief, this old gentlewoman greatly taxed my dear mother's almost invincible patience, but it stood the strain, not breaking down even on the memorable morning when Grandma, as we called her by courtesy, did not come to breakfast nor to prayers. We knocked at her door. Dead silence within. We listened. A hush as of the grave! We pried open the lock, our hearts beating with awe and fear. Tableau! There sat Grandma, fully dressed in black bombazine, white fluted cap over her brown false front (a woman with natural gray hair would not have behaved so, I am sure), white kerchief crossed over her ample breast, spectacles on, Bible in her hand. Forestalling speech of ours, the dame severely said, as soon as our heads appeared in the doorway:

"What is the meaning, may I ask, of this remarkable intrusion? Am I not to be permitted to enjoy my devotions in peace?"

I hold firmly to the belief that there are two sides to every question that can possibly be presented to a human being. *This* question has, perhaps, three or four sides. *Imprimis*, we generally conceive of the ideal home as being composed of father, mother, and children. When the children are in the nursery, in the time of all others susceptible to impressions, and of all others formative, we do prefer for them the molding hand only of those to whom God has committed their care. Yet a grandmother, an aunt, a dear kinsman, is often directly helpful and of great advantage in a child's life. And perhaps an outsider, not so close as these, may be by way of a liberal education to the little ones and young people in the home.

An outsider brings in, for one thing, another point of view. It is always well to get the point of view of others than one's immediate relatives. Our own people may have excellent notions and admirable ways, but it does not follow that these will not be improved by some modification, some new influence from without. Just as travel broadens and enlarges the mind of the traveler, so the stay-at-home person may be broadened by the daily intercourse with somebody whose experiences are entirely opposite from his own.

The presence of an outsider in the home is apt to repress certain candors and familiarities which do not tend to peace. There is less friction where there is the practice of courteous conventionalities than where people allow themselves to find fault unchecked, or to utter hasty words, which may soon be repented of, but leave a sting, nevertheless, and a scar.

An outsider probably helps to bring the housekeeping up to a high-water mark of uniform painstaking. Spotted

table-cloths, soiled napkins, clouded silver, lint-rough china and glass, should never be tolerated in a domestic interior; but, for many reasons, the matron who is disposed to condone sins of omission and commission in these regards will insist on proper attention in all departments when there is some one outside her own family to be considered.

Finally, my sisters, let me advise you, if the outsider comes into the shelter of your home, to make him quickly, so far as you can, a partaker of all that is best within it; give him the freedom of the family life, of heart and hearthstone. For, somehow, the very warmth and glow and genial life of the home should enfold all who dwell there, and should bless benignly the stranger within its gates.

With tact and kindly feeling on both sides, this will not do away with the confidence that belongs of right to the inmates. An outsider must not be always in evidence. He or she will not fail, especially, to leave husbands and wives to their own half-hours of talk apart after dinner, or in the later evening. The outsider has duties to the home, and relations quite as definite as those the home has to him or to her.



Was It the Right Size?

By Rachel Dunkirk

In a tiny one-roomed cottage, under a hill that protected a New England village from the northern gales, lived my heroine. The road had been raised a few rods not far from where the cottage stood, so that its roof and stone chimney caught the eye in passing rather than the house, whose gray boards matched the hillside in winter when there was no snow. In the little one-roomed house lived a most loving and kindly-hearted woman, some sixty years old, known to the whole region as "M'ria." No wedding was in keeping with the standards of the neighborhood if M'ria was not busy for days before the date; no funeral was well conducted if M'ria was not present; and certainly the family would not find the house comfortable if she did not stay, after the cortège left for the graveyard, to open windows and let in the sunlight, arrange the furniture and set the table. At jelly-making time she was indispensable, and for the pig-killing season her time was fully engaged. No person ever thought of hurting M'ria's feelings by offering her money. The most arduous service was neighborly service; and her help was accepted in the spirit she rendered it. Her cellar was well supplied with all the farm produce she could use. Butter, golden and fresh, was often a gift that she had the pleasure of sharing with those less favored; fresh meat was almost a daily expression of friendship; while poultry was a regular Sunday dinner, and to this meal she always invited some one whose dinner would not be so choice. About a quarter of a mile beyond M'ria's little home, and almost at the top of the hill, was a large farm-house with still larger barns. Hen-house, duck-pond, rows of hives, corn-crib, all spoke of the prosperous owner. M'ria never talked about this farm, where her services were frequently demanded, but in her innermost heart she always rejoiced when she caught sight of the stones on the top of her own chimney, on her return from her prosperous neighbor's.

One morning, when the first crisp touches of frost told of winter's nearness, the neighbor stopped on his way to the landing with a load of potatoes to tell M'ria that Sally, his wife, was going to try out the lard, and if M'ria would go up and help, Sally would give her a bowl of lard—these were the only neighbors who suggested pay to M'ria. M'ria hurried up her morning's work and went cheerfully up the long hill, saying to herself, "Law, why didn't Sally tell me sooner! might just as well got through earlier and been up there an hour ago!" At eight o'clock M'ria called out cheerfully to Sally as she went through the gate, "Here I am! sorry I was so late." Sally nodded as she pulled the bucket out of the well hand over hand. M'ria expected no more, and went into the house, where pans and pots testified to the hard day's work that was

before them. All day between stove and table the two women trotted. At last, at early candlelight, the rows of pans and crocks filled with the snow-white lard told the story of the success of the day's labor. M'ria was tying on the quilted hood and pinning her blanket shawl about her tightly, for the wind had risen, when her friend and fellow-worker came from the cellar with a pint bowl filled with lard. "Here, M'ria, take this home with you. You know it's good, 'cause ye helped make it," she said, with a half laugh and a slight mantling of color to her thin face. M'ria involuntarily looked at the rows of crocks and pans as she stretched out her hand for the tiny bowl. As if in response to the look, Sally said, "It's a bowlful, M'ria, it's a bowlful, nevertheless."

With her usual grateful smile M'ria took the tiny bowl, and, with the remark that the lard would be solid by morning, opened the door and started on her homeward walk down the hill. As the gray stones of the chimney came in sight, the grateful smile deepened in M'ria's eyes. As she looked back, just before she turned from the road to go through the bars, at the gleam of the one candle burning in the kitchen of the house on the hill, M'ria hurried through the bars, unlocked the door, stroked the cat who came around the house, and lighted two candles. The wind soon brought the fire to the point of cheery companionship, and the teakettle to singing a song. M'ria, before she made the tea, looked once more at the dim light on the hilltop, and at the tiny bowl. "Law! she thinks it is a bowlful!" And the tiny bowl was carried down cellar.



From the Day's Mail

Dear Outlook:

Will you kindly permit me to ask a question about the rule for making marshmallows of the lady who gave us the delightful chapter on candy-making? In attempting to get the materials as directed, I found gum arabic a dollar a pound. As I can buy delicious marshmallows for fifty cents a pound, I thought there must be some mistake. Isn't there something cheaper that is generally used that is just as good?

E. M. P.

In reply to inquiry in regard to the price of white gum arabic, it can be bought of the wholesale druggists at from forty to ninety cents a pound. Half a pound will make quite a quantity. It is always well for those unused to candy-making to try half a recipe at first. If the outlay is as much or more than for the ready-made confections, the pleasure of making one's own and the peculiar relish of home-made productions in this line will perhaps offset the extra cost.

KATHERINE ARMSTRONG.

Dear Outlook:

You ask the opinion of your readers upon the method of teaching faith to children, illustrated in the case of the little fellow who prayed for a pleasant day. Such teaching seems to me to have for its sure end, not faith, but unfaith. A child does not easily recognize an indirect reply to his question; still less can he understand an indirect answer to his prayer. If a stormy day had come, to the disappointment would have been added a doubt of the prayer having reached the ear of God, a feeling that perhaps He did not care for the petition of a little child, an uncertainty as to the depth of the friendship between his mother and the One above, if not also a partial loss of his faith in the mother herself.

Further, the opportunity was lost for giving the little one an inkling of the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. By prayer

The whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

When her boy added to his prayer the request for "a pleasant day to-morrow," the mother might have reminded him of the flowers and grasses, the hillsides and meadows, which were perhaps waiting thirstily for showers, the streams that might be running low so that the water-mills could do no work and all their busy wheels must be stilled; then would come the comparison of his childish field of vision with that of the all-seeing Father.

Or, since a story always reaches children, the mother might have told of the farmer who perhaps had only a field of corn to furnish food for his cattle, and, by the sale of the golden ears, food and clothing for his little children. It would be easy to picture the rustling green rows beginning to droop and turn yellow