

A QUESTION OF CASTE

By Gelett Burgess

I

“MARY,” said Miss Threnstone, “I’m utterly bored!”

“Yes, Miss Threnstone,” replied her maid, with a well-assumed indifference.

“What shall I do about it?” her mistress went on.

“Oh, I suppose there are lots of things to do, in New York, Miss Threnstone; there’s the theatre——”

“Mary, Mary, I thought you were intelligent!” interrupted the lady. “Haven’t you anything really worth while to suggest? Now what do you do when you are bored?” The question came to her lips thoughtlessly, but, at the idea, she grew almost interested.

“I don’t know,” said Mary, a little puzzled. It was not at all usual for her mistress to talk to her like this, and she hardly knew whether to take it as a real invitation to confidence, or as a mere careless whim, but she added, slowly, “You know, Miss Threnstone, it is a little stupid downstairs, sometimes, with only Thompson and James and the cook. I run out to Central Park when I can, but I don’t care for the servants around here, much, so I generally go alone, or with James. I do like the theatre, though. I don’t see why you should ever be bored, Miss Threnstone—you can do anything you want to, can’t you?”

“Mary,” said Miss Threnstone, “I’ll tell you something. You know how I’m in the habit of treating my servants, and you know, perhaps, how other ladies in New York treat theirs; I don’t, I’m sure. But I know

some of them have absurd ideas of making friends of them, and all that, which must be very embarrassing. It would be to me, at any rate, if I were a servant. I never did care for a friendship that was all on one side. If I were in service, now, I’d want it to be a purely business relation, and I shouldn’t want any patronizing, or any affectation of an interest in my welfare, and all that nonsense. Of course, one wants to be treated as a human being with emotions and a certain amount of self-respect, but I have no more curiosity in regard to my maid’s private affairs and her relatives and her economies than a business man has with his clerk’s—and I don’t expect her to be inquisitive about mine.”

Mary had begun to be a little nervous, for this tone was unlike Miss Threnstone’s usual manner, so she waited for her to go on, busying herself with the dressing-table perfunctorily, while her mistress continued:

“I think that is the way a lady should treat her servants, Mary, though it’s too civilized a view to find much favor; but you are an intelligent girl—the most intelligent maid I ever had—and so this talk is an exception to my rule, for I am bored. But I wouldn’t impose on you for the world, Mary, and I have no right to be confidential unless you allow me. I wouldn’t like it myself, you understand. But you don’t mind, do you, Mary?” she asked, with a whimsical tone.

“Oh, no, Miss Threnstone.”

“I almost wish you *did* object,” said the lady, in an abstracted way, for she did much of her thinking aloud when she had an impressible

audience. "It might prove you still more intelligent, you know."

"But you forget that I'm *not* bored," hazarded the maid. It was the first original remark she had ever made to her mistress, and she felt that the occasion justified the omission of the "Miss."

"Well, I'm breaking all rules today, and so must you. You don't consider this tone an impertinence, then?"

"No, indeed, Miss Threnstone. I'm perfectly willing to amuse you any way I can—only I don't quite see how."

"You don't know, perhaps, that friends call me 'that eccentric Miss Threnstone.' It's another way of saying that most of the things they enjoy, or think they do, tire me. They'd call it eccentric for me to talk to you like this."

"You see, it's a fad of mine to be very frank. I don't know whether you do it with your friends, but it's almost my sole amusement. I can afford to, you know, because I'm really quite well off. It costs an awful amount to be frank, unless you're very clever, when it is called rudeness. But I mustn't do all the talking. Really, you *must* answer me, Mary. I don't much mind how."

"Oh, Miss Threnstone, what can I say? I'm not clever and well-read like you, and I can't think so quickly. No one ever talked to me like this before in my life, and it makes me feel so ignorant and cheap to sit down and have you talk to me as if I was a lady."

Miss Threnstone walked over to her and put her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Oh, Mary, excuse me; I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable," she said, kindly. "Of course, it's no use; we can't either of us be natural, I suppose; I don't know why. I'm not really as ill-bred as I seem, but you *are* a very bright girl, Mary. I should know that as well as anyone."

Mary, in spite of all attempts to control herself, broke into tears at this and went toward the door to leave the room. Miss Threnstone

took her hand and led her back gently. "You mustn't go like that," she said; "I couldn't bear it. I'd never forgive myself."

"I never can be anything but a servant," Mary sobbed. "I never can. It's terrible to see what chances some girls have, and to know you can never hope to be one of them. But I've honestly tried to be the best maid any lady ever had. I've just worshipped you, Miss Threnstone, from the day I came here. There's not a lady like you in this city, I'm sure, whether you're eccentric or not. If you could have heard the way I've stood up for you, and lied for you, to keep the servants from knowing what was none of their business to know! You've been so kind to me that I've gone up to my room and cried, many a time, and the servants all make fun of me for it. There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, Miss Threnstone."

Miss Threnstone was as undemonstrative a person as a woman can be, and the attitude of conferring a favor was the hardest of all poses for her to take. Generous of her wealth, her time and even of herself, when her heart was attracted, nothing embarrassed her so much as the act of giving. She was therefore a little troubled at the tensivity of the situation which she had brought about. She disliked the kind of excitement that she called "dramatic," as most persons hate a "scene." So she set herself to calm the girl, and if this interest in the maid's point of view was, like all her interests, analytical, it was neither cold nor unkind. She had discovered a new sensation—a human problem that she had never noticed before. "So you think I am clever?" she continued, after the girl was calmer.

"Oh, yes, indeed!" said Mary. "Everybody says that!"

"And you think I am—well—kind?"

"Oh, you *are*!"

"And"—Miss Threnstone was managing her mouth strictly—"handsome, say?"

"Yes, yes! You are the most——"

"Never mind that, then," Miss Threnstone said. "Of course, you know, too, that I have a sort of fortune, and I have a place—a position, in fact—in a certain social set, though not among the persons whose names you see in the papers, perhaps. And, what is more envied than all that, I am absolutely independent, and old enough to do as I choose. Now, all this would make many persons happy."

"Aren't you happy?" Mary asked, with big brown eyes.

"Well, I won't say exactly unhappy, but a bit tired of it all. How would you like it?"

"Oh, I never would know how to do all that you can do, because I've always been poor; but I'd like to have money—of course, anyone would."

"What would you do with it?"

"I think I'd use it to make myself as much like you as I could."

"This is very embarrassing, Mary; indeed, you mustn't talk like that! Really, you must be sensible!"

"Oh, of course, I know I never could *do* it, Miss Threnstone; don't think I meant that. I'd have to study and see people—that would help me a lot—and I never would dare to do that!"

"That's all nonsense, Mary; you know all the outward and visible signs as well as I do, and no doubt better. You've seen as much of the conventional side of society as I have, and you'd feel quite at home. As for an education—well, I wish it *were* necessary! No one in this town would ever know that you hadn't grandmothers enough, take my word for it. Do you know, my child, that you're quite good-looking? Go and try that cheval glass."

Mary herself was smiling by this time, and she rose good humoredly and stood in front of the mirror.

"A woman who can look at herself in the glass and not lift a finger to touch a lock of hair like that little one on your forehead, well—she'll pass," said Miss Threnstone. "That is, of

course, if she knows what it's there for!"

The maid had heard asteisms of this sort from her mistress often enough before to understand the mood, and she began to enter the game more boldly. Miss Threnstone continued, following the conversation wherever it led her, for this was quite the kind of languid sport of which she was fondest. It mattered little to her where she arrived with the discussion, provided the end did not come as a surprise. She hated surprises above all things, for they robbed her of anticipation. She was not averse to the excitement, but she got the greatest pleasure out of building logical climaxes.

"Don't you think you could manage a dinner, Mary?" she said.

"Oh, if I could talk well."

"Pshaw! If you couldn't talk better than Miss—well, we mustn't use names; but you know all the forks and the finger-bowls, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; I think I would know how to act, because I've waited on the table."

"The hardest thing is to know when to take the initiative and when to follow your leader," Miss Threnstone went on, as if to herself; "that's the last degree—the instinctive sense of the relative importance of things. Unless you're born to it, and are absolutely sure of your position, it takes a deal of tact and experience to teach you that it's quite the proper thing to dare to be yourself occasionally. It's a question of caste. It's like being able to do a favor to an inferior without condescending. But you have plenty of common sense—I wish I were as sure of your spirit."

"Miss Threnstone," said Mary, slowly, "I've never intended to tell you—but you know you told me once I might borrow your books—well, I've read almost every book you've had in your room. I'm a little behind, for I didn't want to take the very latest ones, but I've read them, just to try and keep up with you, all by myself."

"Why, Mary! I haven't read a quarter of them myself," and the

lady resisted an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh aloud. "And do you go to the opera?" she said.

"I've been to see some of the things that you went to," confessed the girl. "You've been so good about letting me off."

"Where do you sit?"

"Of course, I have to sit up pretty high, but I always try to get on the side opposite your box. I can't really see much of you, Miss Threnstone, and so I hope you won't think I have been inquisitive or taking liberties, but I could see the gentlemen going in and coming out."

"Mary," said her mistress, "you're perfectly delicious! I don't think you'd have much trouble in talking to those men. I shall really have to take you some day. But no; that would trouble you, probably. You'll have to go alone. I suppose, now, you really listen, and watch the stage."

"Why, of course—yes. Don't you?"

"Well, sometimes, when the men aren't interesting, and they often aren't. By the way, perhaps you know some of the men, too—one can never tell nowadays."

"Oh, no, indeed, Miss Threnstone—you're joking, of course!"

"But you've seen some of them here," persisted Miss Threnstone; "you know them by sight, at any rate. Tell me, what do you think of Mr. Sentinel? This is positively indecent of me! I suppose some ladies do gossip with their maids, and I never thought of myself in that class—but really, you know, this is simply too thrilling!"

"Do you really want me to say, Miss Threnstone?"

"Oh, I'm in for it now," said her mistress. "Yes, please."

"Well—I don't think he has a sense of humor," asserted the girl.

For the first time in months Miss Threnstone shouted with laughter. "Now, where, in heaven's name, did you get *that* phrase?" she asked, as soon as was possible.

"Why, I read it in the 'Nightin-

gale,'" said Mary, not without a puzzled sense of having made a better shot than she had intended.

"Now, Mary, do you mean to say that you have read the 'Nightingale?'" Miss Threnstone said, wiping her eyes. "Why, you're absolutely bewildering. See here! you've been to the opera and listened, a thing I haven't done for years; you could tell by his looks that Mr. Sentinel hadn't a sense of humor, and I was so busy flirting with him that it took me three dinners and a house-party to find it out—and you've read all the books everyone is talking about—you have even read the 'Nightingale' and—quote it! Why, there aren't ten girls in town that have such a record! You ought to be the lady and I the maid."

"Oh, Miss Threnstone," said Mary, laughing too, "the idea! How impossible!"

"Do you mean that I wouldn't be able to make a good maid?"

"Oh, I'm sure you're clever enough to do anything you try, and there's nothing very difficult about being a maid. You only have to not see things and not hear things and not say things and not laugh——"

"Why, that's just what I've been doing all the Winter, Mary."

"And keep your temper——"

"That's easy; it's never worth while to care."

"And keep on the good side of the butler——"

"Really! But I *am* on the good side of Thompson already."

Miss Threnstone was positively amused; and now, looking for the reason, she saw the climax approaching which her soul loved. It was the inevitable logical conclusion to this train of thought. She and Mary should change places! So now she played with the little sensation, wishing it were practicable to carry out such an amusing drama—that part, rather, which involved Mary; she had no desire for such a violent change in her own environment. Were she to "take up" her own maid it would shock her friends and make a deal of talk, but that didn't matter if Mary

could be induced to accept the proposal and if it weren't too much trouble arranging the preliminaries. There was, besides, a moral consideration.

"I hear a good deal nowadays," Miss Threnstone began, tentatively, "as to the precise effect of 'over-education,' as they call it—of making the poorer classes dissatisfied with their circumstances, by showing them some of the pleasures of those who consider themselves a little more cultivated. I've always thought that whoever has the possibility for growth will find the means somehow, with the greater effect for having fought for it. But I do think we can help in broadening a person's horizon sometimes, and I have faith that it can never permanently injure a person to be shown things as they really are. What do you think, Mary?"

"I don't know, Miss Threnstone—I don't care so much about being happy or contented, but I do want to see things and know things. I'd like to get outside of my own life and see what other people do after the door is shut on me!"

"Why, that's just what we began with, Mary; that's what it is to be bored—to be tired of one's self. The only difference is, that I am too lazy to make any effort. Now, I should think that being a lady's maid might be very interesting after one had once begun, and I suppose you think it would be still more interesting to be a lady, don't you?"

"Why, of course, Miss Threnstone."

"Well, would you like to try? Would you accept the chance, if you were offered it, and take all the consequences?"

"Oh, I should be too frightened," Mary said, in excitement.

"That's just it; and I should be too lazy. I suppose we would better stay as we are." Miss Threnstone almost hoped the subject would be finished here.

"Do you mean that you'd be willing to give me the chance to be a lady—like you?" Mary asked, in surprise.

"Yes; if I were sure that it wouldn't be cruel, I suppose I could be just that eccentric."

"I think I know what you mean," Mary replied, very deliberately, "and I think I'd dare take that risk."

"No!—really?" demanded Miss Threnstone. She had been much interested in the discussion as long as it was pure speculation, and had been amused at watching the working of her maid's mind, but now the prospect of having her theories converted into actions disturbed her more than she cared to acknowledge to herself. She feared that they would "lose in the translation," and yet she had built up this climax so logically that she had too much pride to recede. As long as she could go ahead, one step at a time, her mind forbade her to withdraw.

"I suppose I might arrange it," she said. "I might make you my companion till you were broken in to meeting my friends, and then I could set you up for yourself, perhaps—launch you and settle an income on you, so that you would be free to do as you please—I've helped girls before this, and I could afford it easily enough, but I should feel a good deal of responsibility in your case, especially if you depended on me for advice. You'd have to promise not to do that, you know. I'd help you all I could on questions of fact, but not on questions of conduct. I'd coach you on all the conventions if you'd never ask me what you ought to do. That seems cold-blooded, doesn't it?" Indeed, it did seem cold-blooded to Miss Threnstone herself, and she had purposely been so, in order to discourage the girl and avoid the issue.

"No," said Mary, calmly, "I should be willing to risk all that. Of course, I should be frightened at first, and the question would be whether I could keep from showing it. If I was sure it would amuse you and be worth your while, I'd be willing to do my part. I understand, now, what you'd want. It's like if you wanted to see the play from the front of the theatre without bothering to have to be stage manager or prompter."

This lucid presentation of the case carried Miss Threnstone merrily over the threshold of action, and made her resolve inevitable. But she insisted on one last condition.

"If you have the brains to see all that," she said, "you'll have to do a good deal more than I first expected of you. If you can really amuse me, Mary, I'll give you *carte blanche*. I'd like to see the metamorphosis, but if you're going to become a butterfly you must spin your own cocoon. You must arrange all the preliminaries, do you understand?"

"Yes," said Mary. "I'll see to changing the servants and clothes, and all that."

"Well," said Miss Threnstone, with a little yawn, "we'll consider it settled. I had no idea that I could get out of it so easily. I won't have to think for you, or bother about anything—only look on. You won't mind my watching you, will you, Mary? Of course, I shall do it in a ladylike way, as I would at any of my friends, and I won't take advantage of my position. Though if you care to invite me behind the scenes I'll be glad to call on the leading lady."

"Miss Threnstone," said the girl, "I can't say anything to thank you for all this. I don't know how, and it confuses me to think of, but you surely know how I must feel! I know well enough what people would say of such an agreement, upstairs and down, but I'll promise not to bore you with the preparations, or with any regrets if it is a failure. I've just *got* to do it, for I shall never have such an opportunity again, and I'll take the step all alone, too. When shall we begin?" She spoke low and rapidly, as if the suspense was hard to bear. She would have been handsome, as she stood there with her eyes shining, but that her small chin did not quite bear out their expression of courage.

"I'll send you up a check-book tomorrow," said Miss Threnstone, a little more excited herself than she would have thought possible over a "logical climax." "As soon as you get it you may consider yourself your own mistress."

II

WHEN Miss Threnstone returned to New York from a month's trip in the West she brought with her a Miss Daintor, whom she introduced to her acquaintances as half-friend and half-companion—"a very sweet girl, though a little timid, not having gone out much." The two ladies began a series of little receptions and parties, and it had been so rarely that the eccentric Miss Threnstone entertained that there was much curiosity at her hospitality. Few who were invited failed to appear to see the latest *protégée*. No girl favored with Miss Threnstone's protection could be ignored, and Miss Daintor came in for a good deal of reflected consideration, besides what was due her beauty and personal charms. When Miss Threnstone went so far as to interest herself in commonplace teas and dinners, and to awake to so many conventional duties that had never before attracted her, evidently on Miss Daintor's account, the younger lady was accepted with many manifestations of cordiality. What few questions were asked were answered by her patroness with characteristic brevity.

Miss Threnstone had heretofore enjoyed that much-envied position in society where one is invited everywhere and goes nowhere. She had made the most of being in rather delicate health; indeed, she confessed that it was a fad with her to pose as an invalid, and she was wont to recline on a couch, clad in black velvet, white silk and ermine, entertaining her visitors in a mockingly soulful way. So now, when it was told that she was actually calling upon her old acquaintances, there was considerable surprise at the very queer places that she consented to favor. No one could understand why she, who could go to the Whites and the Blacks, should prefer seeing such persons as the Carroll-Lewis. Miss Threnstone was fond of saying that the Carroll-Lewis let one stay an hour, and you had a chance to get rested, while no one was allowed more than ten minutes at the Whites

and the Blacks; footmen on the sidewalk and the yellow carpet down the Blacks' steps frightened her.

Miss Daintor would have died rather than mention such things in that way—as if one had never been used to a butler! It was hard for her to understand how a lady could voluntarily call attention to any informality in her own establishment. There were subtleties of frankness that she noticed only in Miss Threnstone and a few others who were surest of their positions, and she gave up attempting to solve the problem. She was the most perplexed at their treatment of the servants. Almost all the persons in their set ignored the servants' presence absolutely, looking directly through them, or using them thoughtlessly as hat-trees, as the case might be, and they discussed things before them that one ought to hesitate before confiding to an intimate friend. Miss Daintor knew that while the thoroughly bred servants (and she knew there were thoroughly bred servants as well as thoroughly bred mistresses) made a point and a pride of not hearing, yet she often shuddered to think of the talk and gossip downstairs. Miss Threnstone not only knew the old servants from the new, but she made nicer distinctions, and had some intuitive sense of superpropriety that enabled her to address them personally, almost familiarly, at precisely the proper time, embarrassing neither them nor anyone else.

At the Carroll-Lewises' Miss Daintor was much more ill at ease than at such places as the Whites' or the Blacks'. She was at her best in a ten-minute call, where the gossip and small talk flowed smoothly in shallow channels. She had learned to chatter, as she had learned to dance, and the conversational paths seemed to be as inevitable as the figures in the cotillions. The Carroll-Lewises, however, frightened her, for there the talk ran more deeply, and they usually had clever men who smoked. Miss Daintor grew to fear a clever man who smoked more than anything else in her routine, and she had always to

take water and defend herself in current fiction at such times as there was no escape. She subscribed to all the literary reviews, including some English weeklies, the names of which Miss Threnstone had given her with the assurance that few of even the cleverest men who smoked ever read. Gentlemen attempted personalities at times, but she became able to smell a burning heart-to-heart talk in season to extinguish it before it broke out too violently. She especially disliked and avoided what Miss Threnstone called "real people," for they had many ways of terrifying her. Altogether, it was her desire to keep on the thick ice of conventionality, not being yet ready to fall in love.

The candle-talk which always ended the day was a great delight to Miss Threnstone. The whole experiment had turned out far more successful than she had dared to hope, for Miss Daintor was an apt pupil in Vanity Fair and a clever manager of the little fund of worldly wisdom that experience had given her. Her comments were very refreshing to a person of Miss Threnstone's fancy, and that lady had often much difficulty in concealing the pitch of her amusement. These gay little breezes blew, too, at the most unexpected times—at Miss Daintor's confession of excitement when a gentleman first helped her on with her cloak, at Miss Daintor's daring little attempts at palmistry, and at her never-ending wonder that so many persons were so easily fooled with such a small stock of audacity.

For Miss Daintor had gone on, step by step, never venturing until she was pretty sure of her ground. With women she had little to fear; she knew their terminology and was facile with their "shop," and she chose only the *mondaines* and the most slippery talkers. Here, too, Miss Threnstone could assist her on "questions of fact," as a chamberlain tutors a princeling. But she was less sure of herself with the men, even with the frock-coated figures that most attracted her. To be sure, she could

use her current fiction phrase-book on these, and she wore the theatre to tatters in the effort to amuse them, for they usually came to her in a state of limp ataraxia, and expected to be talked to. At the Carroll-Lewises' the men did most of the amusing themselves. They stood with their backs to the fire, or looked out of the window with affected naïveté and quoted "Alice in Wonderland" till, in spite of herself, Miss Daintor knew most of that mysteriously apposite book by heart and sickened of it the more familiar it grew. The days when she had read the "Nightingale" because Miss Threnstone read it had gone by. It was not at all necessary to know your "Nightingale" at the Whites' or the Blacks'. There was nothing left, then, but to flirt with the men, or to learn golf, which was the White and Black equivalent of the Carroll-Lewis nonsense hobby. But flirting, according to Miss Threnstone, was a "question of conduct," and she would give no advice.

"It's a sacred mystery that has many degrees," Miss Threnstone had laughed; "as many as there are women. It is usually attended with human sacrifice. It is like finding your way in the dark—you never know what you're going to strike. I couldn't help you much if I wanted to, and it would spoil all my fun if I did. You're too serious to play with men, I'm afraid; you've made a study of this game as a whist player does, so that you forget that its real object is to amuse."

The easiest of the men that Miss Daintor had met was Mr. Sentinel. She had known him since the first days of her emergence from the chrysalis, when she returned from the West, and, by constantly meeting him at dinners and receptions, she had established a fairly intimate relationship in which she felt confident. She had once said of him that he had no sense of humor, which remark had happened to be true. She never dared use that phrase again, however, though she had heard it often enough at the Carroll-Lewises'. She had first

said it because it sounded clever and was not what Miss Threnstone would call the "obvious thing"—whatever that meant—but they spoke of so many jovial persons at the Carroll-Lewises' as not having "a sense of humor" that she decided that it must have some especial significance, beyond her interpretation. Miss Threnstone, in fact, was fond of saying that Miss Daintor herself had no sense of humor, though the girl's laughter rang prettily at the slightest provocation.

So it was, when Mr. Sentinel began calling on her alone, that Miss Daintor decided she must no longer try to avoid an encounter single-handed with a man. She would essay a flirtation if necessary, and try to feel her way in the dark where no former experience could help her; she must find out for herself what happened when the door shut. If it should turn out to be a genuine love affair, so much the better, for she had her future to consider. Her course in novel reading, on which she had depended not a little, seemed singularly inadequate to teach her how to act, and so she determined to take her cue from Mr. Sentinel's advances. He was a straightforward and plain-minded man who would have made it very easy for the girl to be her own simple and charming self had she been more secure in her position. He went on stolidly with their friendship, taking it for granted that she was just what she seemed, and he manifested such a loyal interest in her welfare that her conscience often troubled her lest it should be wrong not to inform him regarding the place she held. The girl at last compounded with her misgivings by deciding to wait till the affair became more serious. She had learned to think that men's hearts, when broken on the wheel of pride, were easily mended; if, then, he should truly love her, offer himself, and be shocked at her confession that she was not born a lady, there would not be so very much harm done, after all.

It was very early in the game that an accident happened to cause Miss

Daintor serious perturbation. She had watched herself too carefully not to slip the moment that the tension was relaxed in her mind, and so, one day, the first time that Mr. Sentinel's conversation displayed attentions that might be construed as intentions, the excitement of the interview threw her off her guard, and an old habit asserted its reflex action.

"To think that I should have chosen this day, of all days, to betray myself!" she sobbed, to Miss Threnstone, before she went to bed. "I know he noticed it, and he will never come again—*never!*"

"What in the world did you do?" Miss Threnstone said. "Did you say 'Yes, sir?' Western women often do that, you know."

"No!" cried Miss Daintor, "I could have passed that off as a joke. Why, he asked me for a glass of water, and I—I brought it to him—on a *tray!*" and she would not be comforted.

That Mr. Sentinel did not notice the significance of this incident need hardly be said. He remarked it as little as he had failed to recognize the Maid in the Lady when they had first met. He had been a visitor at the house in the old days when Mary had taken the butler's place, waiting on the table Sunday evenings, but he was of that well-bred sort who are absolutely unconscious of the fact that servants have faces. The girl had been especially afraid of meeting him, but Miss Threnstone assured her, very wisely, that Miss Daintor in a Paris evening gown would obliterate all memories of Mary in cap and apron.

As his attentions became more marked several other slips occurred during Miss Daintor's absorption of mind, and they caused her the keenest anguish of mortification. At one time when he was sitting at the table reading she brought him a book and went carefully around to pass it to him at his left hand, as if it were a salad. It seemed to her at that moment that it was all up with her, and that she must be exposed, like a stage adventuress, but he looked up, and said

only, "You *have* beautiful eyes, haven't you?"

That he was on the verge of a proposal Miss Threnstone knew well enough, but, true to her neutrality, she stayed her hand. She would not intervene even to save a sentimental disaster; she would let the drama play itself out. Miss Daintor also felt that the crisis was coming, but by instinct rather than by inference. She began to put him off and gain time, retarding the outcome partly because of her very feminine panic at being sweetly captured, and partly, too, because she dreaded the disclosure that she told herself his offer would necessitate. Mr. Sentinel, however, was too persistent, in his love-making-by-rule way, to be diverted very long, and the girl saw that it was only a question of opportunity with him; the question was boiling within him, obviously, and she knew that the next time they were alone together he would propose to her, explosively. She knew, too, that she would accept him when he offered marriage. And then would come the test of her confession, and, she felt sure, the entrance into a life where she could honestly be her own mistress.

Miss Daintor's only false steps, so far, had been due to absent-mindedness caused by the obsession of her wooing, but the time came at last for her to be tested by the question of the Relative Importance of Things, which Miss Threnstone had assured her was the *crux* of the gentlewoman. She was even given a broad hint by Fate on the morning of the problem which should have saved her.

At ten o'clock she heard the door-bell ring, and after considerable more than the usual delay in answering, it rang again. Some secret sense told her who it was waiting so impatiently, and she stood in suspense in the upper hall, undecided whether to answer the door herself or not, tempted to and from the decision. What would Mr. Sentinel think if she came herself, like a housewife answering the peddler's knock? Would a lady do that? She hesi-

tated just long enough to exhaust the caller's patience, and then, uneasy in her mind as to the proprieties, especially in view of the state of affairs between them, ran downstairs and opened the door. There was no one on the steps, but half-way down the block a gentleman was slowly walking away. It was Mr. Sentinel, and Miss Daintor went upstairs again, to redden her eyes in her own room until lunch was served.

Late in the afternoon there came another ring at the bell, and Miss Daintor, who had learned this one lesson at least, hurried down, flinging her scruples aside. There was something familiar in the face of the man at the door, and something very perplexing in his manner, too, but it was not Mr. Sentinel, whom she had confidently expected to meet there. She had, indeed, been so sure of it that the surprise of seeing a different face dazed her a little, and his words added to her confusion. It was not until after he had gone that she realized that the person she had faced was James, formerly Miss Threnstone's footman, now Mr. Sentinel's man, and that he had been as embarrassed as she. James had been rather desperately in love with her in the old days of their mutual service, and she had put him off with as many pretexts as she used now with his master, though for different reasons.

All these memories came back to her in the intervals of her greater predicament, for James had brought a message from Mr. Sentinel which baffled her judgment again. He had that afternoon met with a serious accident, and had been brought home unconscious. His first words had been a request that Miss Daintor should come to his house to see him immediately, and James had hurried off to find her, and then to other urgent errands.

It was outside her experience, this, and Miss Daintor again hesitated at the proprieties of the case. Yet, surely, the request could not be denied, and, to be fair to her, she longed to see him and do what she could; but it was,

of course, impossible without a chaperon, for many conventional reasons. She dressed in haste and set out at once to find Miss Threnstone, who would undoubtedly accompany her there. But Miss Threnstone had left no word of her whereabouts that afternoon, and there was nothing to do but make the rounds of the most likely places to find her. Miss Daintor took a cab directly to the Whites' and found Miss Threnstone had left there an hour before, and from that place the pursuit led her back and forth across town for two or three hours. She grew more and more excited and nervous as the time was spent, and in that cab she fought out her poor little ignorant fight; the Lady against the Woman. The case seemed clear at first to her mind that had studied the rules but never the exceptions of social usages. She had sworn allegiance to new customs that did not provide for cases like this. Several times she decided to direct the driver to Mr. Sentinel's house. The hand of the little clock in the brougham went up and down the dial with her moods; she had her finger on the electric button more than once, fearing to press the bell, but at last, thinking that Miss Threnstone must surely have returned, she drove home. It was now seven o'clock, and hurrying in, she found Miss Threnstone at the dinner-table with her hat still on her head and her gloves beside her plate.

"Here's a letter that was just left for you," said Miss Threnstone, before Miss Daintor had time to speak; "and did you know Mr. Sentinel has just had a severe accident? He was run over this afternoon. It was thought at first he was quite seriously hurt, but I believe he's out of danger now. I was going to run right over as soon as I had had a bite of dinner. You'll come, too, of course? I didn't know whether you'd be at home to-night or not, and so I wasn't going to wait. By the way, did you know that James is Mr. Sentinel's valet now? I had such a queer little talk with him when he came to bring your letter! There

was certainly something the matter with him besides the accident, but I couldn't make out what."

Miss Daintor by this time was very white. She had opened the letter with the point of a fork and read it, her lower lip trembling as Miss Threnstone talked. When she had torn it into little pieces and tossed them into her plate, she looked up slowly and walked toward the door.

"I think I won't go over to-night," she said.

For some reason or other Miss Daintor left, within a week, on an indefinite visit to the West, and Miss Threnstone, who had again become an amateur invalid, did not continue on terms with society. As she sat alone in the candle light one night after the new departure, she laid down her volume of the "Nightingale" with an abstracted smile.

"There are a few questions I'd like to have answered," she said. "What I'd like to know is, just why the Lady didn't dare to see the Gentleman, and exactly why the Gentleman didn't want to see the Lady. And then there's the question of the Man and the Maid. Did the Man tell the Gentleman that the Maid was not a Lady? Did the Gentleman write to the Lady not to come because he found she was a Maid? Or was it because he had hoped she was neither a Maid nor a Lady, but a true Woman? I strongly suspect that the answer to the whole secret lies with the Man.

"However," said the eccentric Miss Threnstone, as she gave a little yawn, "there's no question about the Change of Environment; that was a Logical Climax. And, of course, there's no question as to the Relative Importance of Things; that's a Question of Caste!"



HER TROUSSEAU

FLOUNCES, frills and furbelows,
Daintiest of *lingerie*;
Hand and foot-wear, gloves and hose,
Trim and stylish as can be.

Jackets, ulsters, opera cloaks,
Mackintoshes, wraps galore;
Hats and bonnets, tams and toques,
Suiting country, sea and shore.

Every changing hour and season
Has its gown appropriate;
Every ribbon has its reason,
Every detail marks a date.

Jewels neck and hands to cumber,
Filmy lace to decorate;
Wedding gifts in endless number,
Priceless china, precious plate.

So Miss Million comes a bride,
Bringing for her dower-part
All that fortune can provide.
Has she—does she bring—a heart?

S. DECATUR SMITH, JR.

A MAD MEDLEY

NOW 'tis March that loudly trumpets near and far,
 And he whirls the aged shanghai off the bough,
 And he quickly gets a focus
 On the bosom of the crocus,

Which he bursts to gaily gild the inner cow.
 The mosquito tunes his sandalwood guitar,
 And the shad roe thumps his ribboned tambourine,
 And the circus poster's shining,
 And the bearded goat is dining
 On the pink pyjamas dimpling on the green.

But on Spring's sounding shore
 March roars the following roar:

"Rip, rap, flip, flap, riot and romp all day,
 Ripping, zipping, slipping along over the meadows gray,
 Wildly scooting, madly tooting out with the ships at play—
 Oh, I'm a surly, burly bully, and out for a big hooray!"

Now the Ethiop is singing full of bliss
 As he wallops on the wall the kalsomine,
 And the fumes of soap and borax
 Nimbly nail us on the thorax,
 And the legend of the pill begins to shine;
 Oh, the organ grinder's slipped his chrysalis,
 And the monkey scampers blithely up the blinds
 For the evanescent copper
 Which 'tis eminently proper
 Should begild the genial grinder as he grinds.

Yet March pipes in the trees
 Such syllables as these:

"Rip, rap, flip, flap, roister and romp all day,
 Jumping, slumping, bumping along over the town and away,
 Grimly growling, harshly howling out with the ships at play—
 Oh, I'm a surly, burly bully, and out for a big hooray!"

Now the lambkin's somersaulting on the slope,
 And the mint upon the sauce begins to beam,
 While the radish and the berry
 Cast a nimbus more than merry
 Round the dainty hocus-pocus of our dream.
 Now Love dallies with the tender bud of hope,
 And the chicken from the egg begins to pop,
 And the flitting moth is sighted
 Round the lamp of Spring, just lighted,
 And the proud Bermuda onion is on top.

Still March, o'er marsh and mere,
 Roars loud and sharp and clear:

"Rip, rap, flip, flap, rumpus and romp all day,
 Clashing, crashing, smashing along, with never the time to stay,
 Madly moaning, grimly groaning out with the ships at play—
 Oh, I'm a surly, burly bully, and out for a big hooray!"

R. K. MUNKITTRICK.