

DOMESTIC

By MAX ORELL, Author of "Jonathan and His Continent," "John Bull and His Island," "John Bull's Daughters," "Etc."

Now let us pass on to the different working classes of society. There, too, we find woman's sovereignty indisputable, and the men in leading strings. In the French household the woman is the mistress, as she is in the English household. Her empire over her children is perfect, and she leads her husband by the nose. He does not complain of this; on the contrary, he enjoys it, and he thinks that, after all, much worse might happen to him. The wife knows all her husband's affairs, and when he has a few savings to invest he does not think it beneath him to ask her advice. She knows, as well as he, the current price of stocks at the Bourse; and if it should be seized with a prurient eye to embark in speculation, she brings to bear all her influence over him to induce him to buy consols or any other government securities. Call on her husband on business, and if he is from home you will not need to make a second visit on that account; she has all the affairs of the firm at her finger's end.

She is the goddess of economy and order. Every little bourgeoisie keeps a memorandum book, in which she writes down all her expenses. Nothing is forgotten, not even the halfpenny to the blind beggar who plays the flute at the street corner. The French woman has a genius for cookery, and is thoroughly awake to the fact that it is good policy to make life so that it is as good as done. I believe there is a saying in England that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach; but I fancy there are many English women who do not use this pathway as much as they might. The politics of matrimony is a science that is in vogue in France. A French woman, rich or poor, she has always the charm of femininity. She is always smart, always alert, and has a little fluttering, bustling way with her that is bound to keep awake your interest in all she does. She may be sometimes a little affected, but she is never vulgar. On Sundays and holidays she dresses still a good deal more elegantly than usual, but she never appears to be in any clothes. The middle class French woman is lady-like, not only in her dress, but in her speech. You will never see her loaded with cheap jewelry, this great stamp of vulgarity; and when she speaks to you, you cannot guess whether she is the wife of a gentleman or of a small tradesman. Notice that she often changes the style of her hair. That is because she knows that hair lives on trifles, and that the best dishes become trite if they are always served with the same sauce. Even if her stock of clothes is scanty, her clever brain and fingers help her to cover its deficiencies by constant little changes. With two or three dresses in her possession, the dear little hump will make you believe that she has a well filled wardrobe.

I have often in England heard French women called frivolous. But this is the height of absurdity, and, in my quality of Frenchman, surely I ought to be as good a judge of the point as the English tourist. How can French women, who are perhaps, of all women in the world, the most initiated into the affairs of their husbands, be frivolous? If frivolity consists in trying to remain young and attractive as long as possible without becoming ridiculous, then the French bourgeoisie is frivolous. If, again, frivolity consists in making a home cheerful and gay, and preventing a husband from being absorbed by the cares of business, then she is frivolous. But this is nonsense. Is she frivolous, this woman who is the friend and confidante of her husband—who, in important matters as well as in the smallest, has both a consultative and deliberative voice in the household? Is she frivolous, who knows, with her economy and good management, how to face the danger when, from one cause or another, the family revenue diminishes; is she who knows, with her energy, how to ward off ruin from her threshold. If this woman were frivolous, how could you explain the adoration for the mother which, even to the lowest of the low, you find in France? Becholt is she could this be, unless she were the example of all domestic virtues? If a Frenchman of 40 would hesitate to take an important step in life without first consulting his mother, surely it must be that he recognizes in her a wise guide. It would be mere naivete on my part to dwell longer on this absurd charge of frivolity.

Take now the shop keeping classes. There, too, we find the wife the active partner of her husband. Becholt is she both as the commercial traveler displays his goods on the counter. The wife is supreme. Her objections are without appeal, her opinion final. It is she who generally has charge of the books and the cash box, and neither books nor cash were ever intrusted to better guardianship. She is not a mere housekeeper, with or without wages; she is the partner, not merely a sleeping partner. This not only enables her to be of great help to her husband, but it also enables her, if she happens to become a widow, to carry on the business without her husband, to be independent and to bring up her children. She has not, to obtain her living on her husband's death, to become a working housekeeper or a nurse; she is the mistress of her own house as before, and now the head of the firm. In her shop she will be as good as a servant; and if you wish her to take you for a gentleman, don't keep your hat on while you are engaged with her in a commercial transaction.

I have still present in my memory the following little anecdote: A well dressed man once entered a perfumer's shop where I was purchasing a pair of gloves. Keeping his hat on all the time, he addressed the perfumer. But wife in a most offhand manner. But what expatiated the dear woman was that, after inquiring about the price of some score of articles, he prepared to retire, saying: "He didn't think he wanted anything." "I think you do," replied the woman, who was not to be wholly without a revenge; "you want a pair of new lessons in politeness, at all events."

It is said that Louis XIV, the most haughty and magnificent monarch of modern times, used to lift his hat even to the female servants of his court. If so, no man need think that he derogates from his dignity by keeping his hat off in a respectable shop when he is served by a woman.

I might say a word or two on the drawbacks of the influence of women on Frenchmen; but there is no doubt that this influence has polished our manners.

and simple snowy cap. She is clean and tidy and the personification of industry. I do not doubt, however, that, thanks to the blessings of civilization and compulsory education, the time will soon come when she will want to imitate the ladies of the town in her habits and dress, and that her sons will despise the dear land where they were born, and will all want to be clerks, and swagger in town with high staid up collars, tight trousers and sticks. Thank goodness, this alarming prospect does not yet seem to loom in France. This good, hard working, thrifty woman is the backbone of the country. The amount of work she can get through is simply prodigious. You will always see her busy, either working in her field, selling the produce of her little farm in the market place of the nearest town, or engaged about her little household. Whether she takes her cow to the field or is on her way to town; whether she is sitting behind her wares waiting for customers, or in a railway station waiting for her train, look at her fingers busy on a pair of stockings. She does not know what it is to be idle for a single moment. She has never left her dear village, and for her the world is made up of her "three acres and a cow." But she has got them, and, thanks to her frugal habits and splendid management, her family can live and thrive on them. She is not attractive, but she is a picture of health and contentment.

Shares and bonds may go up or down without disturbing her peace; she holds none. She trusts her savings to nobody. Bankers, she thinks, company directors and stockholders, are only respectable persons; but when the old stockings are swollen with five franc pieces, she rounds off her little family domain and buys a new field—something she is quite sure to find in its place when she wakes up in the morning. Her daughter goes into service, and makes a capital servant. Like her mother, she thinks but of one thing—saving her wages. She does not for her the world is made up of her "three acres and a cow." But she has got them, and, thanks to her frugal habits and splendid management, her family can live and thrive on them. She is not attractive, but she is a picture of health and contentment.

Let me give you an example of her frugality, and allow me to take it from a personal recollection. My mother has a household which has been with her twenty-five years. Not long ago, while in France, I took aside this old servant: "I know how devoted you have been to my mother," I said to her. "You are not strong, and I dare say you will not be able to do so long again; but yourself easy about this. If anything should happen to my mother, I shall see that you are comfortable for the rest of your life. But," I said inquiringly, "I have no doubt you have something of your own by this time?"

Imagine my surprise when I heard her tell me she had saved over 10,000 francs, all well invested, including one share in the Canal Company! Since I have mentioned the Canal, why should I not take the opportunity for trying to explain the uncertainty that was some time ago created in France by the British policy in Egypt? You must bear in mind that the Suez canal was not made by big capitalists. It was made by the savings bank of France; by the "old stockings"; that is to say, by the small bourgeois, the working people and the serfs. What I would add, that the riches of France arise from the economy imposed upon every French household by the women. I might even say that the Suez canal is the work of the French women. This canal is essentially a national enterprise, and the least French mechanic will tell you "we have made the Suez canal." You will find very few French families possessing as many as ten shares. They are spread all over the country.

Well, let the few unscrupulous journalists attempt to prove to the people that the English want to annex or protect Egypt in order to seize on the Suez canal, and you will easily imagine the effect. What a pity it seems that nations can only talk to other nations through their political press! What a pity it is that the British people do not know the French neighbors who live in plain words that they are the partner for the gigantic work they have made, and that they will never dream of being connected with the Suez canal otherwise than as good customers to help them get good dividends!

These same women of France did something grander than this. It was they who redeemed their beloved country, and paid off the Prussian eighteen years ago.

IV—LOVE IN FRANCE. All Frenchmen Love Because They Can't Help It—Restrictions Unmarried "Young Folks"—French Marriage Customs. There is probably no being in whom the bump of amateness is more developed than it is in the Frenchman. The poor fellow must love; he cannot help it. At 12 years of age he is deeply in love with a little girl he has met with her mamma in one of the public gardens of the town, and to whom he prettily lifts or hides and so forth. He does not declare his love, in the distance he throws rapturous kisses at "her," when near he casts down his eyes and looks silly. He dreams that his little lady love is being carried off by some miscreant, that he comes to her rescue, saves her, throws himself at her feet, and declares himself her slave forever.

over, when crossed in love, he seldom goes the length of committing suicide. He does not go in for such extreme measures; he generally prefers resorting to sarcasm; he loves "another." Like cork like: similia similibus curantur. Flirtation is not a French pastime. A few married women may indulge in it; but girls, whatever may be said to the contrary, very seldom do. A woman who flirted would pass in France for a girl, not for a lady; she knows her countrymen too well for that. She is aware, when she coquettes with them, what she is exposing herself to.

If French girls felt inclined for a little flirtation, how could they indulge in it? Good heavens! What would her mother and father say if they saw her taking a walk by herself during the day—if it came to their knowledge that a young man had actually dared to whisper words of love into her ear before he had laid bare his heart and made a clear statement of his finances to them in the first place? Even when he has obtained consent of the parent, and his visits to the house where his fiancée resides are permitted, the young couple are not allowed to see each other even for a moment without the presence of a third party. The possessive pronoun familiar to English lovers by the term "my darling" is absolutely unknown to courtship as practiced in France.

As soon as two young French people are in love they want to die, unless their parents immediately consent to their marriage, which is very seldom the case. Well, to wish to die under these circumstances is a trifle irrational, but love and reason seldom go together. Of love into love, and almost before he had laid bare his heart and made a clear statement of his finances to them in the first place? Even when he has obtained consent of the parent, and his visits to the house where his fiancée resides are permitted, the young couple are not allowed to see each other even for a moment without the presence of a third party. The possessive pronoun familiar to English lovers by the term "my darling" is absolutely unknown to courtship as practiced in France.

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