

A NOVEL HOLIDAY.

A REAL EXPERIENCE.



N this age, the prevailing characteristic of which is said with some degree of truth to be a love of variety and change, when men and women, boys and girls have "rages" for amusements and crazes for new inventions, when tile painting is followed by crystoleum painting, and that again after a few months has become a thing of the past; when the streets during one week are crowded with boys on stilts, and the next by boys with whip-tops—one is doing a kindness to one's fellow creatures if one can give them information concerning any new and pleasant experience which one has passed through, and which they too, at least some among them, may pass through also if they will.

Perhaps there is nothing which a girl feels to be so enjoyable as, for a time, altering her ordinary mode of life and her ordinary surroundings; the more complete the change the pleasanter it is. It must be only for a time, however. Very soon the desire for what one has been born and bred to, whatever it may be, is felt. The cottager is charmed to leave his little house for a visit to a large one. For a time the leisure, the luxury, and comfort of the servants' hall is delicious, but before long it palls, and the little cottage is the only home-like and thoroughly habitable place. It is the old story which Tennyson has told us in the "Lord of Burleigh." In the same way, to those who are habitually waited upon, whose work is rather that of the head than of the hand, there is a great delight in trying what manual labour is like. For the benefit of those who feel interested in hearing the result of such an experiment, I write this account of a week in a cottage.

It was at the end of June that the idea was first started that four of us girls should take a cottage while its owner was away on a holiday, and should live there for a week, doing everything for ourselves, and keeping the place clean without any help from outsiders. Much amusement was expressed by our friends and relations at the new game we were going to play, for we all looked upon it in the light of a joke, though we intended to do our work thoroughly well. It was an intensely hot afternoon when we arrived at our destination, and in my mind, at any rate, there was a wish, which of course I would not have expressed on any account, that it might not on that day be my fate to cook the dinner. We had not abandoned, you see, our usual habits in the matter of dining late, and I am inclined to think that here perhaps we made a mistake, for the amount of washing up which dinner entailed kept the kitchenmaid busy until far on into the evening. The cottage looked very attractive when we reached it—it was one of the more modern kind—red brick and gable ended, with pretty lattice windows, and the rooms were large and airy. It was situated close to a lane, but hardly visible from it—away from other cottages—surrounded by corn fields, so that neither our appearance nor our doings could be criticised by more experienced rustics. One thing that struck us at once was that the heat in the cottage was far more intense than in a larger house, especially in the bedrooms, which had the orthodox sloping roofs. The first thing to do was to get ourselves into suitable garb for work; and when we had attired ourselves in print dresses, caps, and aprons, we felt completely

transformed into servants and equal to anything. Then came the division of labour. Of course we were each to have our turn at every kind of work—kitchenmaid's, cook's, and housemaid's. As there were four of us, we had to have two housemaids, but by embarking on a good deal of scrubbing and cleaning we found plenty for them to do. We were none of us quite novices at household work. Two of the party knew a good deal about cooking, and we gave them up the kitchen for the first two days, the result being eminently satisfactory. Meanwhile the remaining two of us set to work to make the beds and prepare the bedrooms for the night. The jugs had to be filled with water, and here the first of our difficulties presented itself. In vain we hunted for a pump or tap from which to draw the water; none was to be found; and, rather to our dismay, we at length discovered that all the water must be brought up in a pail from a deep well in the garden. However, it was primitive, and after all the correct thing in a cottage, so we did our best to enjoy standing in the burning heat while we wound up the rope. It needed a very long and strong pull before we landed the bucket safely at the top, often to find that it contained a wriggling frog or several beetles. I need hardly say that we contrived a means of procuring our drinking water elsewhere.

Well, to return. A good deal of time was necessarily occupied in examining the resources of the cottage. Darkness would be coming on soon, and lamps and candles had to be found. Then the dinner table was laid in the kitchen, for we kept the parlour for visitors, and we sat down, the cook for the day taking the head of the table, and the kitchenmaid clearing away after the courses, and carrying off the plates and dishes to the scullery. The best of the cooks could make excellent soup, and under her direction we made several different kinds, and learnt a good deal. We went in for small dishes rather than joints, partly because they gave us an opportunity of showing our powers in the cooking way, and gave us more variety; moreover, in such hot weather we preferred salmon mayonnaise, salads, and cold dishes of all sorts. I was initiated into the mysteries of mayonnaise sauce, and though I found it sufficiently easy to learn how to make it, it was extremely wearisome, and the more I see and know of cooking the greater is my surprise at and admiration of the patience of cooks. We had very little difficulty in the matter of puddings, for it was a time when there was abundance of fruit, raspberries, gooseberries, and cherries, and of these we never got tired. We were very proud of having no absolute failures in cooking. I don't think much food was wasted or thrown away. On one occasion certainly, when we made our first batch of bread, the result was not as satisfactory as it ought to have been. There was something wrong with the yeast, and, moreover, I grieve to state, that I had the care of it in the oven while cook was out, and I was so busy shelling peas and talking under the verandah that I left it in an hour too long. One misfortune did certainly befall us, which might have proved serious. There was a fifth inhabitant of the cottage whom I have not mentioned before—a big collie, who was not of much assistance to us in our work—except in eating up the scraps, but was a protection to us, as far as we needed any, and was allowed to roam about at night as he chose. It happened one evening that we had lamb for dinner, rather a large joint, for there were some visitors who came to inspect us in our new quarters, and the remainder of the meat was carefully put away by the cook in the larder, with a view to luncheon the next day; in fact,

we depended upon this joint for our midday meal. But it was not to be allowed us. The following morning at six o'clock the remains of the lamb—that is to say the bone, for there was little else—were found on the kitchen floor. The larder door had not been shut in the general lock-up at night, and the temptation, doubtless resisted for some time (for the dog was well brought up), had in the end proved too strong. Fortunately we were not far from friends, and we all went out to luncheon. This was really our only *contretemps*.

It soon appeared that our plan of constantly changing our work was a very good one. Not only did we learn more, but it distributed the work more equally. The kitchenmaid's place soon proved to be much the hardest. Her work never seemed to be done, if she was properly particular about leaving pots and pans in good order, and the scullery clean. Then, too, it was her duty to get up and clean the kitchen grate and light the fire, and in order to do all this and get water boiling for coffee by half-past eight, she had to be down stairs soon after six; and work before breakfast on a hot morning, without any early cup of tea, is most exhausting. Cleaning out frying pans and saucepans is a task that needs energy, and is not altogether pleasant, but by dint of using a good deal of sand and soda we became very expert in the art. The cook did no washing up. Her time was spent in preparing the food and watching it on the fire. The kitchenmaid washed up the plates and dishes, but the housemaid had to do the silver, which, I believe, is the correct arrangement. The housemaids of course had the care of the bedrooms. They made the beds together, and then the upper housemaid or parlourmaid cleared away breakfast and dusted the parlour, while the under housemaid scrubbed the staircase or one of the bedrooms. Scrubbing was work we all had a fancy for, but we were so energetic that we soon got wearied; we also liked cleaning the steps with hearthstone, it was such satisfactory work, and, as they say, paid one for one's trouble. In the early morning it fell to the lot of the under housemaid to clean the boots and knives. Naturally there was no knife-machine at the cottage, so they had to be cleaned on a board, and until one has tried it, it is impossible to judge what a long and tiresome task it is. The middle of the knives got cleaned long before the tops do, and one cannot get rid of the little black dirty patches near the handles. The boots were a much easier matter.

Comparing ourselves with professionalists, we found that we got through our work in the house more quickly than they do; we had usually finished everything we could think of in the way of cleaning by half-past eleven, but then the consequence of rushing through our work was, that we were utterly tired out—in body only—for our spirits never flagged, whereas professionals take their work more calmly, and spread it over a longer period.

One effect of our hard work was that we thoroughly enjoyed a holiday. I never before fully appreciated what it was to have a Sunday out; and when our time was over, and we mourned over parting and leaving the cottage, I confess that our sorrow was tempered by joy at the thought that we were going to sleep in beds which we should not have to make, and to eat off plates which we need not wash up.

For those who are inclined to criticise the work of their subordinates without understanding its difficulties, I would strongly recommend a holiday week of this kind, which I can promise them will prove enjoyable and instructive, for we all felt that we came away wiser though certainly not sadder women.