FASHION DEMANDS TIGHT LACING

Mode of Fifty Years Ago Is Here Again—New Styles of Spring Gowns.

(Special Correspondence.)

New York, Feb. 8.—The first and the most stringent commandment of the modistes now is, you must be well corseted. If you are not, and if you have principles against reducing your waist measure by means of a long, steady pull on your stay strings, then don't, for good look's sake, attempt to have your spring gowns cut on the new mode. A large waist is not to be tolerated with the shape of skirt and basque we are now wearing, and every woman who still nourishes the ancient belief of her sex that comfort and health ought to be invariably sacrificed to beauty, is banting and lacing with the vigor of fifty years ago.

This is woeful, but we are all panting after a small, round zone, a sweeping hip arch and a perfectly flat abdomen, which are only to be got by means of the new canvas silk and linen stays, with their tough silk laces. Most of the new corsets are, to begin with, absolutely plain; their only ornamentation is a little decorative needlework about their tips. They are heavily boned, but the best of them are not made in the clumsy coutille, by the strength of which such store used to be laid.

Coutille, it is agreed, gives the figure a stiff, hard expression, and nowadays the desire is to be closely laced without losing supple grace of aspect. The truly well cut corsets are made very short in the back, curved out under the shoulder blade, and on the hip proper they are short and boneless, while the steel and whalebone are brought to the front. By this simple device it is wonderful the way useful curves are thrown out and humpish superfluity crushed in, and a woman whose stays are very tight moves about with the apparent elasticity of a skirt dancer.

Now, we won't raise any hygienic questions here, but rest on the assertion that from a modish point of view the new corset accomplishes wonders, and if you happen to be as thin as the proverbial fence rail, so thin, indeed, that no amount of lacing could produce hips or bust, then you can easily buy a pair of prepared stays that will produce them for you. These will be made of a linen net, having aerated pads in the right places. The pads, by the way, are so prepared as not to heat the body, and so diminish the flesh, as clumsy cotton pads do. Next summer such delicately built women as need neither to lace nor to pad, will popularize the sweetest little corsets made all of a tough, flat linen lace, while already for home wear the corset makers are showing pretty things made of horizontal rows of linen beading, through which broad satin ribbons run to form the walls of the stay.

SPANGLED GOWNS.

Next after corsets and their vagaries and cruelties, the topic of most burning interest among fashionable feminines is jetted net. Who is so poor, or so hopelessly conservative that a jetted net is not possible or needed in her wardrobe? Everyone who assumes to have a social place possesses one, and it is safe to say that the cost of a pretty costume of this material, in black net, of course, illuminated with black sequins and hung over black lace silk, can be reckoned at $50 and up. The economy of this species of toilet is that it is assured to be eminently smart for the next twelve months, and it is appropriate for every occasion.

Like the good wine that needs no bush, a sequined net requires no trimming, and the more severely simple its build the more absolute is its claim to be called fashionable. Very few of these toilets but are made up high in the throat and long in the sleeve, with an underwaist of silk so contrived that the arms and shoulders can be swathed in or denuded of the silk linings at the wearer's will, or as occasion seems to demand, a high or decollete effect beneath her net waist. The skirt must be very long in front and boasting some train behind, and the highest authorities do not counsel the wearing of colored neck bands or girdles with such a brilliant black toilet.

En passant, let it be advised that you who care to be abreast of fashion do not buy anything more in turquoise blue. Wear out whatever you have of this, or lay it away, and make your bows and neckbands and fresh hat crowns of velvet or satin in mauve. If, however, blue is essentially your color, adopt Sevres or ash blue. They are both tender, lovely tones, and very much in demand. Antique or uncut velvet is a material that has had just one winter of vogue, and was never a very useful goods.

NEW COLLARS AND GIRDLES.

The dressmakers no longer countenance the use of ribbon girdles and collars on their new toilets. They insist that it is neither tidy nor becoming to finish off a dress so, and that the collar especially should be a fixed and rather elaborate detail of a costume. They are opening a spring of collars that are high as ever, with ruffs and lappets back of the ears and often very big bows in front. A crush velvet stock is not good taste; it has been superseded by a stiffened band of silk laid in tiny perpendicular tucks, having pointed projecting bits set on and resting directly behind the ears.

All the girdles are narrow folds of velvet drawn to a slight point in front, often through a tiny bright buckle or just folded over at the ends and made fast with invisible pins.

Make ready, say the milliners, for a spring of small hats raised off the face and in shape but slight departures from the toques in velvet that have prevailed all winter. One feature of the straw hats is already budding forth, and that is delicate tulle trimming. By this is not implied the gilded tulle toques that very smart personages are already wearing, but simple straw shapes, showing pretty big rosettes of tulle with hearts of small flowers. Many sensible souls are ripping off dusty ribbons from their faithful winter headgear and furbishing up with these sweet, clean tulle ornaments, in deep rose tulle, for instance, with dull red carnation hearts; lilac tulle with violet centers, or white net with buttercup hearts.

SPRING SILKS.

The silks for the new season are flaunting their glories in every shop, and some of them are old friends with novel names. A goodly showing, though, is made of genuine recruits, and among them are surahs and foulards that are guaranteed to wash and concerning whose popularity there need be no question.

The newest color in foulards is orchard bloom, and it is noticeable that crisp silks have somehow crept out of sight. In the place of the once dearly-loved taffeta we have tricotine, marchalette and moirette and pongee up to date, showing a soft fineness and beauty of decoration that is beyond anything ever seen before. Bengaline silk poplin and light wool goods with a strong infusion of silk command even more interest than the silks themselves.

French cashmere with a velvet surface and an almost transparent nuns' veiling, spotted or striped with silk, is the sort of thing that claims every shopper's attention just now. We all want airy cloths to drape over colored silk skirts, and we are getting very deep in checks. That which is not checked is quite sure to be striped, such for example as the pongee lawns and the fancy lusters and Canton cloths. A book full of flowery language might easily be devoted to a description of these latest fruits of the loom, but one pleasant truth all shoppers now bear in mind, is that it requires less material than ever before to make a gown, in spite of trains having come for a good long visit.

MARY DEAN.

GREAT DECAY OF FEMALE BEAUTY

Eminent Portrait Painter Says the Potent Cause Is Man's Absolute Indifference.

BY MILLICENT ARROWPOINT.

"Is physical beauty in women on the decline?" was a question propounded the other day to Sir Edward Poynter, the president of the Royal academy.

Sir Edward, who has put as many fair feminine faces on canvas as any artist in his time, rapped out an uncompromising yes. The painter undoubtedly spoke for his own country, and within the range of his own experience; nevertheless, it is obvious that a similar assertion may be made concerning women in America.

"The United States, in the past 100 years, has certainly produced a greater number of handsome women than any other civilized country, but, unfortunately, since feminine beauty defies statistics, we have no figures to compare on the subject, for all that the standard of beauty among our women grows lower every year," said a New York portrait painter, whose work is known from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

"There are a number of reasons to be cited as responsible for the existence of this condition," he said. "One of the most potent reasons, I think, is the absolute indifference of the nineteenth century, and especially the American man, to physical perfection in womankind.

"Even fifty years ago they were vastly more sensitive to its influence and interested in its phases. Young fellows a half century back read poetry, nourished romantic dreams, wore their hair about their ears and indited verses, in imitation of Byron, to dark-eyed Inez and golden-haired Helen. Fairy forms, clustering ringlets, azure orbs, etc., flitted through their dreams, and the woman whose appearance tallied in a measure with these standards was reverenced and adored as the ideal sweetheart and wife.

"He did not care a rap whether Inez could read Greek or not, or understood a word of parliamentary law, but he did delight over her blushes, her swan throat and alabaster shoulders, and the portrait painters of that day prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that she possessed most of these charms in an abundance we don't see any longer.

"An ugly girl was in rather hard lines then, good tempered and witty as she might be, for the young man was romantic, and it was the Sweet Alice, with no great intellectual force, but lots of brown hair, dewey freshness and timid admiration of him, who inflamed his sentimental heart. Her beauty was her stock in trade, she and her mother knew its value and everybody envied and worshiped it.

"Nowadays the girl who sets out to rule in society, by the virtue of a lovely face and figure, is apt to find herself queening it over a very few masculine subjects. I don't know whether the men or the women are to blame for this change, but certain it is that no matter if she be as subtly graceful as Cleopatra, as fair as Helen of Troy, she will have no swains adoring her for those gifts of nature alone. What the modern man now admires is a lively miss, whose tongue rattles as brisk a measure as castanets, who has a spontaneous ready laugh, who can make golf balls sing through the air, who is full of grit and go and jokes, who is not afraid to put a cigarette between her lips, who is, in short, a jolly good fellow. If her feet are small, her waist a snug circle, her eyes bright and her clothes in the height of fashion she is a belle and easily passes muster as a beauty whose claim nobody disputes. All the poetry and the novels of the day proclaim the supremacy of this little lady. The novelists no longer bother to tell you whether their heroines are fair or not, nobody cares. Heroines who have an influence, like the chic women who rule in society, don't rest on any such laurels as luxuriant tresses, snowy necks and pearly teeth. Those were the weapons of women of another time, both in books and in real life.

"Today, if a woman must have admiration, she either goes in for athletics, or learning, or she dresses her daring, vivacious little self up in Paris gowns, and thus earns her belleship. Whether she does this because she prefers to be athletic, and learned and what not else, to her old power beauty, or whether she has grasped at them as substitutes for her lost and irretrievable loveliness, I don't vouch. It is enough to say that they are bound to suffice, and everyone is apparently happy, except the artists and sculptors, who find it harder and harder every year to secure proper models.

"All these, however, are not the prime reasons for the decay of beauty. Men are philisophic and have learned to estimate mental over physical charm, chiefly because the new woman has not much beauty to offer. There is a notion prevalent among the gentler sex that it is very foolish to waste time nourishing her bodily charms; that there are more important callings in this world. Having decided to underestimate this great gift she is as busy as possible destroying it.

"She is doing it by overstudy for one thing. In payment for her book learning she is contracting her chest, extinguishing the limpid light in her eyes and bleaching her cheeks. In payment for her tremendous athletics she is growing horny-palmed, with heavy muscles, ruining the contours of her limbs, her complexion is weather-beaten and her hair is rough. In society she overwhelms her strength with so many duties and pleasures and such extravagant rich food that she is the victim of gout, nervousness, neuralgia and dyspepsia and ill-health has sapped the color, spoiled her figure and aged her before her time.

"To sum up my argument, I would conclude that the whole course of our civilization is against the growth of feminine beauty. Men no longer care for it, and women no longer nourish it. The typical American girl, if she is pretty, has every generation a shorter period of bloom. By the time she is 30, when really she should be in all the vital splendor of ripe loveliness, she is growing either very thin or very fat, her hair is getting dry, harsh and scant, her skin pale and wrinkled; in face she is fading and by 40 she is resigned to appear like an old woman.

"Her daughters naturally will enjoy a shorter period of bloom and earlier succumb to the blight that our elaborate modern food, close, hot houses, sedentary way of life and mental exertions invariably bring. There may be some stern souls who are quite content to see our women's beauty take wings, but in the long run, not higher education nor golf championships will repay the sweethearts and wives of the future for the loss of nature's glorious gift, and the world is going to be a colder and harder place to live in for the loss of the pretty woman."

SNOWBOUND.

BY SUSA YOUNG GATES.

We were all amused and interested in the soldier laddies who found their way from their own sleepers into ours. No doubt they were all lonesome; they belonged to an Iowa company, just returning from Honolulu. Everybody was restless in the enforced quiet of our surroundings, and we were glad of variety.

We were certainly snowbound. Everywhere about us were snowy mountains, and mountains of snow. The trains had puffed up the long, steep grades from the west, halted near this station, crowded passengers into one or two coaches, then pushed the long trains down the sidetracks and left them to stand there indefinitely.

As the days passed in this small village near the large hotel in the Colorado mountains, people became more or less acquainted with all the other people who came, sharing the same anxiety and the same discomfort with varying degrees of patience.

We were glad, we women, that we had a baby and a little girl among the passengers in our sleeper, for they were not only pretty, they were delightfully good, and good-natured.

However, I think the one passenger who interested us all and furnished us food for speculation with a touch of romantic interest, was the dark-haired, youthful soldier, with his coat of blue and his buttons of brass.

He was an innocent lad, and his year's soldiering in Honolulu had done little else than make him homesick, and he liked to linger near the matured women in our car, talking of his home and people.

"Good-morning," said cheery Mrs. Maguire, as he approached us the fourth day of our imprisonment. "How are you this morning?"

He sat down, his bonny face saddened with the driving snowstorm outside our car windows.

"Well," he remarked tentatively, "when I waked up this morning and looked out and saw this raging storm, I was almost sorry that I was brought up in a pious family and didn't learn to swear."

He pulled his slender silken mustache with a fine show of manly impatience, and every woman in the party half sympathized with him.

"I don't know what my folks will think. It's enough for a fellow to be away from home for some purpose, but to come home after a year's sickness and suspense in an army camp, to get within a day's ride of home and then be shut up like this—well, it's more than a nuisance."

"And what will the little wife do?" asked Mrs. Maguire, whom the lad had chosen as his special confidant.

"Well, that's it! When a man has no family cares, he can endure these difficulties with more patience. You can imagine," he added, with a twinkle in his brown eyes, "how my wife will feel, for, you know, you are a wife yourself."

"Oh, but I don't know!" protested she. "I can't imagine how she would feel, for I am sure I should quite enjoy being relieved of my husband for a whole year. I get so tired of looking at him all the time."

The young fellow was unable to parry this, and so began to talk about life in Honolulu.

It was delightful to listen to the long, half humorous description of strange lands and strange people. Yet still more delightful to hear the loyal lips turn continuously to the theme of home, father, mother and wife, and away from the topic of conquest and war.

"And have you breakfasted?" asked one of the party.

"Oh, yes," answered he; "soldiers have plenty when they have hardtack and coffee."

He could not amuse himself with the card games of many of his companions, for he could not take part in the gambling, slight though it might be, which amused the others.

Day followed day. We were to get out in six hours, in twelve, then tomorrow, and tomorrow! And so the days drifted on.

We told all our stories to each other, gave detailed accounts of various life experiences of little or no moment, wrote dozens of letters which would not be posted till after we were safe at home. Then we shared each other's luncheons till they began to be rations.

There was on the other side of the snowslide which blockaded our road a passenger train coming from the opposite direction. We speculated a little as to their supply of coal, food and water, their resources for amusement, and their annoyance and discomfort as compared with our own. We were only six miles apart, and yet were separated by days of cold, lonely anxiety.

That six miles down the hill to the open road of travel, destination and home came to seem like six interminable periods of time and distance.

Gaunt, tired men, with exhaustion on every feature, passed our windows with snowpicks and shovels, their feet tied up in gunny-sacking, their ears muffled in old-fashioned comforters. And when a thought of discontent or murmuring bubbled to the lips, one glance at the worn, worried faces of the railroad men would shame our discontent into silence.

The day came when the conductor brought the welcome news that the "cut" had been made, in spite of cold, storm and difficulty, and the train from the opposite direction was approaching us.

Our soldier boy was with us when the announcement was made. His weary eyes sparkled with the fire of sudden expectation; the pale face flamed up with the excited thoughts of home and wife; we were all anxious with our various individual hopes and plans, thwarted and undone by this long mountain imprisonment, but what was our joy and delight, we who were old and worn with life and its cares, compared to the exquisite happiness of youth, love and reunion after a year of sickening suspense and fear! We hushed our own pleasure to listen to the strains of joyful anticipation which poured from the lips of the soldier husband with almost delirious joy.

"Oh, you see, it does pay, after all, to try to be a white fellow and to do half way what's right. Some men would have me believe that God lives a long way off, you know, Mrs. Maguire; but I have found when I was away off there, in a hospital and far from wife and home, that God is very near a man, as near as he is to woman and to little children."

And how our soft women's hearts yearned to him as he confessed his own manly reliance upon the power which had sustained us!

"My wife, see," he went on, with the confidential volubility of sudden excitement, "is a Christian, as well as my good mother, and the last word she said to me was to keep my Testament over my heart and to keep God and her inside."

All this while the other train was slowly approaching us from the other side. We were overjoyed, of course, and when our soldier lad volunteered to go and see what the prospects were, laughingly adding:

"I'll just look in the cars of the approaching train and see if there's anybody there from Iowa," we all waved him a merry good-bye, and watched him plow his way past the windows up towards the head of the train.

It was not a half hour later that he came back, the dear lad, his face white and drawn, his lips quivering with pain.

He paid no attention to any of us, but went at once to Mrs. Maguire, and leaning over her he said, in a voice shaking with emotion:

"Dear lady, could you consent to get off here, and help me for a day or so? God led me into that train, for I found my precious little wife there with her younger brother, both of them coming to meet me. But the exposure and anxiety of this last week has made her sick, and I must stay here in Leadville a few days with her till she is able to travel."

Mrs. Maguire studied but a moment, then, with a cheerful smile, she began gathering up her things, remarking:

"Don't worry, my boy, your wife will be all right; she has a touch of the grip. We'll pull her through, don't fear. In a few days she'll be better than ever before."

We all helped our friendly traveling companion to get away from us, much as we would miss her; she was going on an errand of mercy, and I'm not sure that there was not a touch of envy in our hearts concerning her and her mission. She would see all the end of the pretty little war and blockade romance and enjoy to the full the sweet happiness of the reunited young couple.

"God bless you both and the little wife," we all said, almost in a breath. And our eyes filled with tears as the dear soldier boy grasped our hands in farewell and thanked us for our sympathy and prayers.

We were about to start away ourselves, but we rushed out to the platform and could just see in the distance a muffled female form carried by two men towards the station, one a brave boy in blue, while our whilom friend, Mrs. Maguire, could be seen following them with her shawl on her arm.

She happened to turn and must have seen our faces peering past the car, for she waved a farewell which we all returned by waving our handkerchiefs vigorously. Then we were off, and our snowbound experience was only another chapter in the strange history of life.

TIM BRANNIGAN'S COURTSHIP.

How An Irish Iceman Won His Sweetheart, a Shy New England Girl.

BY B. W. CHANNING.

Brannigan carried ice for the Sylvan Spring Ice company. He was a goodly young fellow, standing six feet one in his stockings, with a countenance deeply bronzed by weather, out of which his wide blue eyes laughed unceasingly. His flannel shirt, open a little at the base of the strong, round throat, and his broad felt hat, indented with a veritable "Denver poke," gave him a cowboy effect. He was perfectly cognizant of this, and traded on it with the maids at the various houses on his beat, before whom he swaggered not a little, dropping hints of a western past, strewn with Indian scalps.

"And was you ever there, now, Mr. Brannigan?" one of them once asked him, and he answered, ambiguously:

"Aw, an' if I hadn't a-been, how would I get the wownd on me crown?"

"What wownd on your crown? Go on!"

"I'll show it ye if ye'll step over here."

Brannigan bent his burnished curls, and pretty Nora stretched on tiptoe to meet them. But just as the two heads reached one level, the hero lifted his own quickly and kissed the fresh-colored face that looked so intently at him.

"Sure, the situation was that convaynient, I cuddent help it!" he urged, fleeing to the door with a smart cuff ringing in his ears. Brannigan called this sort of thing "Passin' the time." It is only fair to add that he passed it in no worse ways. But he was to learn that there was a type of womanhood demanding more deferential approach.

The first time he saw Alma was on a hot afternoon in August, when she had just come down from Nova Scotia, and was feeling the atmosphere of the south end oppressive. Her mother, who kept a boarding house, and had combined with that responsibility the care of a shiftless second husband and his two small boys, had written to Halifax that Alma was needed; and Alma, who had a good place there, had dutifully responded to the maternal summons. She was a slender, dark-haired girl, with a delicate complexion, and slim, ladylike hands.

Brannigan, swinging in with his huge ice-block, took a swift, appreciative look at her, dumped the ice in its receptacle, and stopped on the return swing for conversation.

"'Tis a warm day!"

"Dreadful," said Alma, listlessly.

"I didn't see ye before?"

"No; I've just come."

"Ye'll not stay here; the old lady can't kape no gyuri more than a week; 'tis a hole of a place!"

Alma looked gravely at him, and he wondered, until she said:

"I'm Mrs. Brown's daughter from Halifax."

Brannigan went away at that, suddenly speechless.

He saw her nearly every day after, but did not seem to make much headway. A packet of chewing gum, which had appeared to him a graceful attention suitable from any gentleman to any lady, was received with disappointing coldness.

"It's very kind of you," she said, "but I never use it. Mrs. Dalby, where I lived in Halifax, thought it was common."

But Brannigan was hard to snub. Like Antaeus, he rose the lustier for his falls.

II.

One day about a month after her arrival, he found Alma alone in the kitchen—her mother's large and slovenly person was usually well in evidence—and marked with concern that her eyes were red with crying. Now, Brannigan had a man's philosophy regarding tears.

"Aren't ye well at all?" he asked, coming up beside her.

"I'm all right!" said Alma, holding her head down, and plunging her thin little arms into a tub of soap suds.

The next moment she was startled and scandalized by the clasp of an arm about her waist, and the touch of a brown moustache on her cheek.

"Ah, cheer up!" whispered Brannigan, tenderly. "It don't sthorm ivery day!"

Alma freed herself with a quickness that threw him on the defensive. In his experience, where there was no response in kind, there were active reprisals. He stepped back to avoid the expected slap, but the girl made no sort of demonstration. She simply stood there with a white face and looked unutterable reproach.

Tactics of so novel a kind were discomposing. Brannigan's bronzed cheek flamed, and the laugh died out of his eyes.

"Say, I'm mighty sorry!" he murmured. "I niver thought but ye'd like it! The gyurls mostly does, an' 'tis no harm at all."

"I'm not that kind," said Alma, sternly.

Brannigan was already convinced of this. He regarded her sheepishly and ran his hand through his jungle of sunny curls.

"I'm mighty sorry," he repeated, and as Alma showed no sign of relenting, went dejectedly to the door.

"'Twas sweet what I got of it," he mused, "an' 'tis bad luck I'll get no more. She's not that kind, it's true for her."

III.

The next few times that he carried ice to the house he did not see Alma, and when he did, on the fourth day, her manner was excessively dignified. But, as has been said before, Brannigan was hard to snub. And now, he was more so than ever, for the spirit of self-respect of Alma had wrought in his impulsive heart the mystery of love. Instinctively he reconstructed his too-florid vocabulary and altered some of his ways.

"She's worth takin' trouble for," he said to himself.

An unfailing instinct apprised Alma of his new feeling towards her, and she was aware, though she would not allow it to herself, that she liked the young iceman. His gentle persistence had its reward, and after awhile they had become so far friends that Brannigan hazarded a new departure.

"Do ye iver go out Sunday avenins?" he inquired, one fine Sunday.

"Sunday afternoons I do," Alma amended.

"'Tis great out to the park."

"I've heard it was nice."

"An illigant ride of a warm day on the open cars."

"Yes, I suppose it must be."

Brannigan's face assumed a winning expression of entreaty.

"I'd be proud if ye'd ride out there with me to-morry?"

Alma's delicate color deepened. She gazed fixedly at the handle of the door. A more sensitive admirer than hers might have suspected a hint of dismissal in the direction of her gaze; but Brannigan was not sensitive. He came a step nearer.

"Ah! Say now, won't ye go?"

Alma was silent still.

"Let's say 3 o'clock."

"I'm not through my work till 4."

It was the same thing as an assent.

"I'll call ye at 4!" He went off beaming, but her voice made him turn back in suden panic.

"Don't call for me," she said in a low, hesitating tone; "you—I'd rather you wouldn't. Maybe I'll be at the corner at 4."

The "maybe" had no terrors for Brannigan, who read capitulation in every word, and every line of the drooping figure with its back kept turned away. He marched forth radiant.

IV.

The ride out on the open car was very pleasant. Alma enjoyed every bit of it, though she asked herself frequently, What was she about?

Brannigan was not introspective; besides, he knew what he was about, perfectly. He paid Alma's fares with an authority she dared not gainsay, and sat with his arm on the back of the seat behind her, his eyes traveling delightedly from her Sunday hat, with its impossible decorations, to her sweetly-embarrassed face, and back again. He felt the end in view.

"She's my gyurl!" he was saying to himself, proudly, "an' if she don't know it yet, she's goin' to!"

His heart swelled; he almost wished some man would do something for which he could knock him down. He had the primitive instincts of the tribal lover; he wanted to show his strength to the woman he desired, and to have her know that strength would always stand between her and danger.

This feeling increased as time went on and he saw more clearly that Alma was unhappy at home. Her eyes were often red. She complained of headache, and on being pressed, confessed that "the boys were tiresome."

Brannigan once heard one of them speak rudely to her, and promptly lifted the young cub by the scruff of the neck, demanding if he knew what they did to bad boys back in the west? Tommy whined a denial, and Brannigan thundered out:

"Well, if I iver hear ye open your head to your sister that way again, I'll show ye!"

But it only made things harder for Alma to have a champion. The stepfather dropped insinuations that made her face burn, and the boys jeered her about her sweetheart."

"Say," Brannigan announced one Sunday, "if that stepfather of yours don't behave himself, I'll be sewin' a button on him one of these days!"

Alma dreaded some such issue; she changed the subject.

V.

One afternoon a strange man came with the ice.

"Tim Brannigan's hurt," he explained. It appeared that Brannigan had been at a fire, and, rushing out of the burning tenement with a forgotten baby, had fallen and broken his leg. He was in the city hospital.

The next day Alma dressed herself with care in the blue gown Brannigan liked, and the Sunday hat with its soaring plumes and outspreading ribbons and started for the hospital. The boys saw her before she gained the corner, and screamed impertinences after her, but she never turned her head.

It was, fortunately, a visiting day.

When Brannigan saw Alma enter the ward, his face was radiate with joy. He wanted to jump up and run to meet her. And yet, when she reached the bedside, he was lying very still, with closed eyes—or, with eyes that seemed to be closed.

"Ah, an' is it you?" he asked faintly, feigning a languid awakening. "'Tis good of ye to come, but I'm that wake I can scarcely take it in!"

A great lump rose in Alma's throat. She had not thought to find him so low.

"Oh, but you'll soon be better, Mr. Brannigan!" she said, struggling not to cry.

"Ah, an' do ye think so?" he asked, feebly.

"Yes, indeed; you don't look so very sick now, really you don't."

"Looks is desavin'!" he sighed; "me mother was always afeared she'd niver raise me, an' I'm doubtin' she had the right of it."

Alma looked down at his splendid proportions in perfect seriousness. A sense of humor had not been included among her other qualities, and Brannigan's fun always bewildered her.

"Do you feel a pain anywhere?" she asked, fearfully.

"Ahful, just here!" said Brannigan, laying a muscular hand upon the cardiac region. Not a muscle of her face changed, as he saw through his half-shut eyes. A ripple of laughter passed over him, and he bit his lips under the long, tawny moustache. And while he laughed he could have fallen at her feet, she was so adorably innocent!

Alma saw and wholly misinterpreted the tremor which shook him.

"Are you cold?" she inquired, anxiously. She knew that it was a bad sign to feel cold in serious illness.

"Froze out!" said Brannigan, in a choked voice, another and more violent tremor convulsing him.

Alma grew seriously alarmed.

"Don't they give you anything for a chill?" she asked.

"They can't give me nothin'," he whispered, "'twouldn't do no good!"

Poor Alma began to cry. She did not know people never died of a broken leg; and with Brannigan's young strength and health, it was inexplicable.

But, certainly, he was near his end. Reckless of observation, she bent her face to his and kissed him. And then a strange thing occurred, for the helpless sufferer revived, returned her farewell salute with interest, and held the girl close in a clasp of astonishing vigor.

"Oh, my! Mr. Brannigan, aren't you ashamed? And me thinking you that ill!" gasped Alma.

But he only laughed in a shameless way.

"I niver told ye there was anything wrong wid me arms!" he cried. "An' I was just sufferin' for a kiss, dear! Ye've niver let me have one till now! (he repaid himself for the deprivation). Ah, Alma darlin', say ye'll go to the priest wid me whin I'm out o' here! I've a tidy bit in the bank, an' niver a soul dependin' on me, an' I'd make ye so happy ye'd not know yerself"——

He became aware of the severely-disapproving regard of a middle-aged nurse on the other side of the bed, and let Alma go. Then he winked with glad effrontery at the intruder.

"'Tis all right!" he assured her, "kissin' ain't agin the rules whin it's a man's own gyurl he's goin' to marry—is it, now? An' ye're gain' to marry me the minute I'm out, aren't ye, Alma me dear?"

Alma was torn with a variety of emotions; but she loved Brannigan.

"Yes," she said.

THEY CAN SIGN GIANT CHECKS.

Millionaire Women Who Manage Their Own Property—Overdressed and Ill-mannered New Yorkers.

BY EMILY HOLT.

Nobody in New York any longer gives teas. That one word brands you as a country bumpkin if you use it in the intent to describe what is now called a reception, or still more graphically denoted as an "In and Out." A tea used to be a function without special form of meaning. Any hostess at any time could commit a tea, so to speak, for no reason or any reason.

This season the number of reception teas have been cut down about one-half, and those that are held have their guests carefully selected and invariably denote the exploiting of a lion. Mrs. Astor or Mrs. Belmont, for instance, never announce themselves as merely at home, they specifically invite you to meet between the hours of 5 and 7 some interesting specimen from the ever replenished menagerie of celebrities. The celebrities include every variety of human curiosity, from a cuffless, red-bearded Russian anarchist to the very latest thing in dukes. All this gives a zest and piquancy to receptions, and the wily hostesses no longer have the least difficulty in securing plenty of men.

Every hostess, by the way, has her specialty in lions. Some women, as Mrs. Charles Worthington, for example, Mrs. Levi Morton and Mrs. Hewett care only for the literary fellows. When well known authors, like Zangwill and Kipling, both of whom, at present are in New York, reach the city they are as diligently hunted, and first possession of them as seriously struggled for, as if they were special reductions at a bargain counter. Holger Drachman, the Danish poet, is another reception feature of vast importance, but beside the women who give receptions around writers, is a coterie headed by Miss Breese, who snap up the musical geniuses as soon as they get foot on America's shores; a third set wrangle and maneuver mightily to feature their receptions with artists, while the greatest number naturally fight to secure the foreigners with handles to their names.

When the Grand Duke Vladimir of Russia was in New York, two months ago, he found on his arrival at his hotel more invitations to the houses of rich and fashionable women than he could have accepted in a month. Not one of the women did he know, but every one had sought and cultivated the acquaintance of the Russian consul to New York weeks in advance, and all with a view of laying pipes for the possession of the grand duke, who only spent one day and a half in this town. The British consul is assiduously petted and dined because of his facilities for introducing members of his own aristocracy who drift to New York, but often enough the women sleuths secure the coveted honor with no other aid than their own daring and wit.

There is a tale going the rounds of a prince and princess of pure royal pedigree who a few weeks ago stopped incog at a New York hotel. A lady of great social position boldly called upon the princess and, introducing herself, offered her hospitality. The princess seemed about to yield when her would-be hostess ruined her opportunity of bagging this big game by begging that her royal highness, when she came, would wear her coronet and orders. It is needless to say, her royal highness reconsidered her own amiability, and the lady lost the chance of exploiting one of the largest lions that has been in America this year. It is a pity that New York City can no longer boast the production of the most aristocratic women in America. Some years ago the best dressed, best bred women undoubtedly did hail from this metropolis, but latterly disintegration has set in, and for tasteless over dressing and insufferably bad deportment the daughter of Manhattan wins hands down.

If anybody doubts the charge of over dressing, let her betake herself to one of the smart morning functions at the Waldorf-Astoria. It may be a dramatic breakfast, or a musical luncheon, for New York women love anything in the form of a matinee, and as they crowd in the big ball room, just take stock, if you please, of the jewels alone that she adorns herself with before 11 a. m. A chain of diamonds and turquoise dropping to her knees, a watch and watch pin of star sapphires and diamonds at her belt, a string of pearls with a diamond clasp, from which swing a diamond incrusted locket close about the throat, a huge pearl and diamond brooch in her neck stock, three diamond and turquoise hat pins, a gold rimmed card case studded with jewels, a gold net purse with bediamonded clasp and a couple of gemmed bangles, is a veracious statement of the artucles itemized in the adornment of a lady of vast social position who swept into a dramatic breakfast the other morning in a huge public hotel.

Shades of good taste! You may well exclaim, but she was not alone in her vulgar, inappropriate glory. Those who went before and came behind her had also emptied their jewel boxes over themselves, and they all wore white glace gloves, tossing white plumes and embroidered velvet gowns. At the opera and theatre matinees they flaunt their sartorial splendors with even greater recklessness. You will see any Saturday slim beauties, such as Mrs. Paget, Mrs. Whitney and Mrs. Mockey, in snow-white cloth and cream satin gowns sparkling with diamante trimming and coats of white velvet, while carriage women go shopping in black satin slippers and open worked silk hosiery after breakfast.

But if our New York women have lost all equilibrium in dress, they are trying very hard to make up for it in manner. The manner that marks an influential Fifth avenueite would do credit to a bronze statue in its unbending hauteur. With shoulders back and nose well up and eyes set in a freezing stare, that is the approved bearing. The body is held quite rigid and the stare stiffens into a stony glare when a stranger is observed. In drawing rooms, on introduction, no one shakes hands. It is considered familiar to do so; you incline your head in a slow nod merely, and it seems almost indecent to smile, cringing to be polite and fairly servile to be cordial and hospitable, at least this is the rule among the women whose names stand at the head of the social register and by whom society manners and customs New York are judged.

THEIR BIG CHECKS.

With all her faults there is no more capable business woman to be found anywhere than she who is in the smart set in New York. There is no use trying to estimate the number of feminine millionaires who live on Fifth avenue and its fashionable tributaries, but it is safe to say that most of these ladies know as much of the value of money and how to take care of their inheritances as the willest of Wall street bankers.

Miss Serena Rhinelander has one of the oldest and biggest New York estates on her hands, and she keeps the management of it mainly in her own hands. She owns scores of tenement and apartment houses, knows their exact condition and the rental they should yield, and she has perfected herself in domestic architecture to be able to examine and criticise intelligently all building and improvement plans for her property. Mrs. Elisha Dyer personally administers every penny of her own big inheritance. She superintends and draws a large revenue from her big Maryland stock farm, deals occasionally in real estate and has, by clever manipulation, increased her wealth. Mrs. Dunlap Hopkins, who will be a richer woman at some future day than she is even now, is her own adviser on investments, her own agent and bookkeeper.

To realize what the care of these estates impries, the reader must understand that each and every one of these ladies is worth in her own right well into the millions. Mrs. Elliot F. Shepard and Mrs. Fitzhugh Whitehouse are each worth something over $10,000,000. Perhaps either of these two ladies can draw the biggest checks of any women in New York, and next after them, perhaps, comes Miss Caroline de Forest and Mrs. Wysong, who individually enjoy incomes of $50,000 a year, and who, like Mrs. Arthur Dodge and Mrs. Herter, know how and where every cent of their capital is invested. The financial good sense and acumen of these millionairesses is very well attested by the fact that rarely does a rich widow or heiress, so long as she keeps in her own hands the conduct of her property, feel any shrinkage in her fortune, and every one of these women are, in spite of their shrewdness the most admirable landladies. Mrs. Shepard's improved tenements are among the best in New York. Miss Rhinelander has given more land as the sites for handsome philanthropic edifices than any one New York man, and Miss Helen Gould, who possesses as fine a row of tenements as any landlord in the city, has never permitted her agent to press a poor lessee or evict one, though she has never failed to collect her rents.

HE PACKS AND SEALS MONEY.

An Official Who Could Steal Millions and Escape Detection Six Months.

(New York World.)

There is only one man in the United States who could steal $10,000,000 and not have the theft discovered for six months. This man has a salary of $1,200 a year. His name is John R. Brown. Mr. Brown's interesting duty it is to be the packer of currency under James F. Meline, the assistant treasurer of the United States, who says that his is a place where automatic safeguards and checks fail, and where the government must trust to the honesty of the official.

All the currency printed at the bureau of engraving and printing is completed in the treasury building by having the red seal printed on it there. It comes to the treasury building in sheets of four notes each, and when the seal has been imprinted on the notes they are cut apart and put into packages to dry. John Brown's duty is to put up the packages of notes and seal them.

Brown does his work in a cage at the end of the room in which the completion of the notes is accomplished—the room of the division of issues. The notes are arranged in packages of 100 before they are brought into the cage. Each package has its paper strap on which the number and denomination is given in printed characters. Forty are put together in two piles of twenty each and placed in a power press. This press is worked by a lever, something like an old style cotton press. There are openings above and below through which strings can be slipped after Brown has pulled the lever and compressed the package. These strings hold the package together while stout manila paper is drawn around it. This paper is folded as though about a pound of tea and sealed with wax. Then a label is pasted on it showing in plain characters what is within. The packages are of uniform size and any variation from the standard would be noticed. But a dishonest man in Brown's position could slip a prepared wad of paper into one of the packages and put the notes into his pocket.

If he did this the crime might not be known for six months or a year or even longer. Some day there would come from the treasurer a requisition for a package of notes of a certain denomination. The doctored package would be opened and the shortage would be found. However, the government has never had to meet this situation.

There have been only two men engaged in packing and sealing currency since the treasury department was organized. John T. Barnes began the work. Mr. Barnes's duties were filled temporarily until Nov. 1, when John R. Brown was appointed to the place.

Ordinarily the bureau of engraving and printing delivers to the issue division about fifty-six packages of paper money of 1,000 sheets each, four notes on a sheet, making when separated, 224,000 notes. These notes range in value from $1 to $20, and their aggregate is usually about $1,000,000. The government, however, issues currency in denominations of $50, $100, $500, $1,000. The largest are not printed often, because the amount issued is small.

If it could happen that 224,000 notes of $1,000 each were received from the bureau in one day, the aggregate of value in the fifty-six packages would be $224,000,000. As it is, a little more than 10 per cent of this sum represents the largest amount handled in one day. That is, the packer has handled $25,000,000 in a single day, and not one dollar has gone astray.

STRONG STATEMENTS.

Three Women Relieved of Female Troubles by Mrs. Pinkham.

From Mrs A. W. Smith, 59 Summer St., Biddeford, Me.:

"For several years I suffered with various diseases peculiar to my sex. Was troubled with a burning sensation across the small of my back, that all-gone feeling, was despondent, fretful and discouraged; the least exertion tired me. I tried several doctors but received little benefit. At last I decided to give your Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a trial. The effect of the first bottle was magical. Those symptoms of weakness that I was afflicted with, vanished like vapor before the sun. I cannot speak too highly of your valuable remedy. It is truly a boon to woman."

From Mrs. Melissa Phillips, Lexington, Ind., to Mrs. Pinkham:

"Before I began taking your medicine I had suffered for two years with that tired feeling, headache, backache, no appetite, and a run-down condition of the system. I could not walk across the room. I have taken four bottles of the Vegetable Compound, one box of Liver Pills and used one package of Sanative Wash, and now feel like a new woman, and am able to do my work."

From Mrs. Mollie E. Herrel, Powell Station, Tenn.:

"For three years I suffered with such a weakness of the back, I could not perform my household duties. I also had falling of the womb, terrible bearing-down pains and headache. I have taken two bottles of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and feel like a new woman. I recommend your medicine to every woman I know."