

## CHAPTER IX

### POLITICS AND HONEYMOONS

Political parties—Parliamentary inexactitudes—Shooting parties—Sportsmen's peculiarities—Experience in a ducal mansion—A midnight mistake—Shot in the face—A shooting picnic—Guests annoyed—A sightseeing family—Buckingham Palace sentry—A general strike episode—A Sister Superior writes a letter—Great social changes—Vegetable people—Marriages of convenience—Honeymoons a mistake—The Greeks' methods—Who are the happiest? — Old maids? — Bachelors? — Sisters of Mercy? — Parsons?

Now I must return to some of my own trivialities.

I have been turning over in my mind which of my parties, in the capacity of hostess, I have enjoyed the most, whether hunting, shooting, political, or for charities. It is hard to say, for I have enjoyed them all. Political parties have at times caused me anxious moments, for the amount of petty jealousies to be contended with, both from individuals and central offices, make one wonder whether it is worth the powder and shot required to help a party, especially when Prime Ministers are entirely under the thumb of their central offices, which is sometimes the case. I heard someone the other day describe a Prime Minister and his wife as "central office exhibits."

At a party of mine comparatively recently, we were discussing Prime Ministers we had met and known, the general opinion being that it is undignified and useless to uphold and remain loyal to a man that one day declares nothing will persuade him to do a thing, and on the next climbs down and does it, like the lady.

in "Don Juan," who, whispering she would ne'er consent, consented.

Then, again, Parliamentary inexactitudes, to put it politely, are upsetting and vexatious, declaring one day that black is white and seeking to prove it, and on another, that they had not meant that; what they really meant was that white is black.

Well, when these good people are rubbing shoulders with those who hold different views and sometimes feel strongly, it requires some tact to avoid friction and explosions.

I am not sure that shooting parties are not equally difficult, for the house-party have to jostle against one another more or less intimately, while a political party is over in an hour or two. Guests come, mix, jostle, and go; but at a big shoot many of the guns are often staying in the house, and people of widely different tastes and politics have to meet in close association.

When the estate is not large there may not be more than two big shoots in the season, and many are expecting to be asked. Think of a Prime Minister being asked and his chief political opponent: the situation would be strained, as diplomatists say. If, perchance, the Prime Minister be a gentleman, his courtesy may save the situation; but we know all Prime Ministers are not gentlemen, and all sorts of possibilities have to be thought out, for what is born in the bread comes out in the butter.

I have had many an amusing half-hour watching sportsmen prepare for a day with their guns. Some are so excited and fussy they tumble over everything and get in everybody's way. They ask silly questions and do not wait for an answer, but follow it up with "What, what?"

Others arrive plaiting their legs with nervousness,

full of apologies for their existence, stand first on one leg and then the other, open the breech of their guns and gaze down them, to be sure there is no cartridge left in by mistake, although they have already looked many times. Then they snap the gun off once or twice, though they know it is a harmful thing to do; but that does not matter, they must be doing something. Then there is the fearful duke, in his own estimation, who arrives at the eleventh hour, and wants a drink before he can do anything more. The sort of person who prays on his knees on Sunday and on his friends the rest of the week. People often fall flat on their faces before these individuals, being, I suppose, too good natured to resent their peculiar conduct. After all, what we want our guests to do is enjoy themselves, as the saying goes, though it is a funny expression, enjoying ourselves. However, what we want is for everybody to be happy in their own way. Live and let live.

Speaking generally, when the men are out with their guns is not the anxious time—they usually agree. It is in the smoking-room after dinner that the crucial moment comes. The first night all are on their guard, and avoid dangerous subjects. On following nights there may be a falling away. Perhaps someone mentions news that he has read in the morning papers; all do not agree with the policy being pursued, then possibly matters become strained.

Again, there is the very important matter of asking the right women to suit the books of the men. I have known keen sportsmen sulky and off their best form if their particular friend was not there. A successful hostess must know all about these things, but appear to know nothing.

I remember when staying in a ducal mansion once for a big shoot being surprised at one or two things.

To make it easy for each guest to find his or her room, all our names were printed on cards and slipped into little brackets on the doors. On the evening of my arrival, shortly before dressing for dinner, our hostess asked me if I would mind changing my room, as an unexpected guest had arrived, after saying she would not be well enough to come; so the arrangement of the rooms had to be altered. I was told all my belongings would be moved into my new room while we dined. This unexpected guest occasioned quite a general post.

Of course, I had not the smallest objection to moving my room. When I retired for the night I found the name on my door was The Marchioness of—— Something had evidently gone wrong, but as I found all my belongings there, I made no fuss, feeling rather exalted at being suddenly a Marchioness; and, unperturbed, I settled down for the night and my first beauty sleep.

After a while I was awakened by a faint knocking at the door, as if someone was tapping with their fingernails. I waited and listened. The sound continued at short intervals, then a low, agitated voice said: "Let me in, let me in, my heart's desire."

Remembering the name on the door, and putting two and two together, I guessed who was sought and who was seeking, so in a cold, severe voice I said: "I am not your heart's desire." There followed a slight rustling sound and all was still. I supposed—well, never mind what I supposed.

At breakfast next morning I proclaimed that I had slept the sleep of the just and looked as if butter would not melt in my mouth.

It is well when shooting with people whose prowess is unknown to you to keep a watchful eye all round. This was brought home to me once later in life, when

my son and I were staying in Wales with some people for shooting.

When out with our guns my son came alongside of me, and in a subdued voice said: "Keep your eye on the Major; I hear that he shoots in the most reckless fashion." I did keep my eyes open, and observed that the Major in question had a most alarming way of following the game with his gun, at times turning almost completely round, pointing in the direction of the other sportsmen and women.

Presently I saw my son, who was some little distance away on my right, fall face downwards to the ground. At first I feared something terrible had happened, then my attention was diverted by spent shot showering over my hat like hailstones in a storm; into my face and down my neck they came, and not too spent to prevent them stinging uncomfortably.

One unfortunate man a little higher up on the hill, who had not followed my son's action of falling prone, had to have thirteen pellets taken out of his face by a doctor. The culprit was apologetic, but not the least unnerved; indeed, I thought he was rather amused.

We have had some amusing sporting experiences, my husband and I, also my son and I. Once a certain Master of Foxhounds, who was very wealthy and had good shooting, asked my son and me to shoot with him. We knew him rather well, and were accustomed to his funny little ways. He was known to be of a saving and careful nature, especially in small things that most people would not think of; but his ever cheery manner and witty tongue prevented people from being annoyed with him. They regarded him as a nice little man, a trifle eccentric.

On the day that is now in my mind, after a good morning's sport, we sat down to a picnic luncheon

that he had provided. In front of my son was a pie with a paper flag sticking out of it, proclaiming that it was a game pie.

The M.F.H., coming round chatting and chaffing, said to my son, "Help the game pie, will you?" and off he went. My offspring set to work in good earnest, but soon I observed he began to look worried; he kept turning over the contents of the pie, but putting nothing on the plates in front of him.

Presently he called: "Here, mother; come and take a hand at this pie, will you?" On complying with his request, he whispered to me: "I can't find a blooming thing but rabbit legs and strange-looking pieces of pork." Neither could I!

Now, a well-made rabbit pie is a very good thing, but when led to expect succulent portions of grouse, partridge, and so forth, it is disappointing to be presented with rabbit legs and curious portions of pig.

I was amused, and had no objection to the dish at all; but some of the party saw nothing funny in it. Especially were they annoyed when they discovered our host consumed with mirth at their discomfiture.

That, however, was not the worst shock, for a bold man asked if he might have something to drink, as he was very thirsty. The laughing host told him it was very bad to drink while shooting. He never drank anything but a little cold tea, which he carried in his pocket in a medicine bottle; but there was plenty of excellent water in the brook in the field below them.

One man said: "This is more than a joke; I shall bring my own provisions next time I come." This, I have since been told, he actually did, without his host turning a hair.

I observed the keepers had learned their lesson, and had brought all they wanted with them, including bottles that went off pop.



It is difficult to understand how any man could be happy and pleased at his guests' discomfiture, yet I had quite an affection for the little man, so had my son.

I am always sorry for people who have no sense of humour; they miss so much pleasure, and it is, I always think, essentially a note of sanity. Laughter levels things.

A few days ago I was walking past Buckingham Palace. There were a crowd of people, evidently up from the country, sight-seeing, gazing at the palace and admiring the guardsman on sentry duty. One family so interested me with their remarks that I was constrained to wait and listen to them. There was a fat, jolly-looking mamma, a rather silent papa, a grown-up son, and some small children.

Mamma to eldest son: “Must cost a deal of money to keep a place like that”—jerking her head in the direction of the palace.

Son: “Wall, we pays for't.”

Mamma: “Get along wiv yer.”

Son: “'Tis true; it's the likes of us that pays taxes that keeps kings and queens. 'Tis us as pays their wages.”

Papa: “I've heard tell they works hard for it.”

The conversation was here interrupted by mamma doubling up and shrieking with laughter, while slapping her knees, calling to the rest of the family to “Look, look at that silly fool!” Her mirth was caused by the sentry walking up and down on his beat and doing that stamp, stamp with his feet on turning round which appears to be a rule they have to observe.

What the movement is in regimental language I have no idea, but it caused the whole family considerable amusement. When the guardsman returned

and had again to do this sort of double shuffle under this family's noses, he was greeted by fresh shrieks of laughter from mamma, now joined by all the rest of the family, who shouted in chorus: "You silly fool! Oh, oh, you silly fool!"

Beyond growing red in the face the sentry showed no signs of embarrassment, but how he must have wished he might stop and have a little pleasant back-chat instead of having to remain Sphinx-like!

I was telling this story to someone the other day, and they said: "How is it that I never see anything funny like you do?"

I thought it would not be polite to give the obvious answer.

Another amusing thing happened lately during the general strike. A covered-in van was being driven along, when one of the "peaceful" pickets tried to stop the driver, declaring he had contraband in the van. The motor driver told the man not to make a fool of himself and go away. This the irate individual refused to do, and said if the driver dared to go on he would find himself with a bashed-in head. The driver had to stop or run over the man, who ran round to the back of the van and opened the door or curtain—I forget which—to see what was inside, when out hopped a handful of police, who were being conveyed to the relief of some of their comrades.

The man was immediately taken care of by the police, and what happened after that I do not know, but the man's face when the police hopped out was a study.

Another nice little story reaches me from a South Coast watering-place. Some Sisters of Mercy, or nuns, I think they are called, who have sought refuge in this country and settled down among us have been for some time trying to master our language, and



congratulating themselves on the progress they have been making.

The Sister Superior, who gives all the housekeeping orders, had arranged with a little help that the butcher should provide so much meat each week at a certain price, on which they agreed, and which the Superior considered reasonable. All went satisfactorily for some time, then she observed that she was being charged more than was in the bargain, so she decided to write to the butcher and remonstrate. This was her letter :

“ DEAR FRIEND,

“ Since we have been come together, at first you were not so dear, but now you are dearer and dearer to me every day ”

Poor mystified butcher !

I wonder if any of my readers, after careful consideration and observation, have come to any conclusion as to who finds the greatest happiness in life—the married, the unmarried, the parsons, priests, or kings?

Great social changes have taken place and grown into customs of late years; we seem to have skipped a generation or two.

I am not sure that I do not look back a little regretfully at the old days when we wrapped ourselves in the mantles of romance and pretence. I am a little afraid of the future; so much that we have grown up thinking refined and good taste seems to have been swallowed up in the war. The magic of the past is gone.

Anyway, to-day we are faced with the philosophy of life, and are perhaps more natural. I have come to the conclusion that for married folk the happiest are

the vegetable people; they get on best together, do not indulge in any high flights of fancy, no great ideals beckon them, they take things as they come, do not think or worry, seldom see the tragedies under their noses, take no thought for the morrow, and accept the impossible creeds handed down to them by vegetable parents. Just buzz along through life like drones, not doing much good, not doing much harm. They are spared a good deal of pain, and much will be forgiven them, for the light of their lamp was dim. They are usually serenely happy, with their hands folded over their tummies, knowing, of course, that they will have to die some day—everybody does, and it can't be helped, and they will have to give an account of their stewardship. But that is a long way off. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." And when the time comes they will sing hymns and buzz along as they have done here. They do not think that their souls will then find speech; not having found it here, they do not anticipate finding it hereafter.

Yes, the vegetable people are happy and content; nothing makes much difference. What does a kiss more or less matter to them? It does not mean much.

Who comes next in happiness and contentment? I think they are those who make the marriages of convenience, when both parties marry for reasons that seem good to them that have been thought out in cold blood. The man perhaps wants money, the woman position, or *vice versa*.

Naturally, they do not argue in these terms, but each thoroughly understands the situation. If these people are in no way repulsive to one another, the union may prove comfortable, even happy, in a sort of colourless way. Neither have pedestals to fall

from, do not expect too much, and each respects the other's motive. If they are decent folk they will play into each other's hands and carry out their part of the arrangement faithfully, both having something to gain by sticking to one another. There being no fire to kindle, there is none to burn out, leaving ashes and disillusion.

Honeymoons are nerve-shattering things, and responsible for a good deal of unhappiness; they are a mistake. From the onlookers' point of view it is, of course, a blessing when the turtle doves disappear until the experiment is over, but whoever invented honeymoons did no kindness to newly married people. There is no time in life when the companionship of other people would be more beneficial.

Logically, there would be more chance of the honeymoon spirit lasting and spreading over a longer period if there were more diversion in the early days by mixing with other people. It is not calculated to bring out the best in a man to be shut up alone with one person say for a fortnight, without any of his usual occupations of sport or business; nothing to do but say the same thing over and over again, nobody to speak to but possibly a woman with a pretty face and the brains of an earwig. No matter how angelic the couple may be they are bound to be bored with one another.

The wise old Greeks had better methods; they shut up the affianced women from their lovers, only allowing occasional meetings. Even when married the man was only allowed visits at stated intervals. Spartan but wholesome. No nerve-shattering modern honeymoons, calculated to kill any finer feelings and make the most peaceful quarrelsome.

Man's attitude towards women is entirely different from woman's regarding herself. A man can be happy

with almost any woman, provided he does not love her. Not so the other sex; some men would be intolerable to them.

The male usually wobbles between woman as wife and woman as mother; he seldom regards her as a responsible, intelligent person, able to think for herself, and there is nothing so paralysing as to feel you are regarded as a fool.

A woman must be tactful, and when one marries, from the first she must never allow her husband to feel that she is his intellectual superior; it would be fatal to conjugal bliss. Anything clever or brainy that the woman's mind conceives she must let her man think emanated from himself; he will then think her clever to understand him so well, but not unpleasantly clever.

Also, at all costs, she must pretend she admires her man's moral character; and this is not a bad idea, for it may lead him into trying to live up to the high standard his wife presupposes.

A certain rudimentary system of morals suitable to elementary schools has percolated through the brains of some men, but their line of argument concerning it is often peculiar and hair splitting. I should like to enlarge on what morality really means, but this is not the place for it, I suppose. Perhaps we had better sum it up as a virtue conceived in expediency and born in compromise.

And we will pass on to see who else finds happiness in life. What about the old maids? No, I do not think many of them are very happy; anything out of reach is annoying, whether it has been put out of reach by ourselves or others. But there are not many old maids now; we have bachelor women instead, which is quite another thing. Some of them are very jovial and happy. But both have the dread of old age, with

none to love and tend them; no one to care whether they live or die, only hirelings around them.

I have always felt that some single ladies past their first youth must at times be lonely, but not until comparatively lately have I realised how very disappointed and empty the lives of some are. It came home to me in rather a curious way. Once when I had been asked to go and speak at a political meeting in a country town unknown to me, two kind old ladies offered me hospitality for the night. They were not married, and the younger sister was interested in what I had to tell them, and before I left had become confidential. Very kindly she insisted on coming to the station to see me off the following morning.

There was a short time to wait before the train came in, so we talked, sitting on an uncomfortable bench on the platform. Poor dear! she politely said she had enjoyed my visit, that I had brought with me a refreshing glimpse of a world from which she was shut out, and that what I had come to tell them had provided fresh and interesting food for thought. I had told her of things unknown to her—that she envied me my life and the good son I told her I was returning to. She confided to me that all her life she had longed for the love of a child, but had never had the chance, and now it was too late. Nobody had ever loved her or asked her to marry him.

The dear lady was embarrassingly frank, saying she had always been unattractive, but had a big hunger to be loved, to be necessary to somebody's happiness.

It was difficult to know what to say by way of comfort; she was in great earnest. I mumbled something about husbands and sons being great anxieties, and that all children are not so good to their parents as my son is to me. But that did not put her off; she

wanted love and children. I was moved, and, looking at her as she sat beside me, I felt there was no reason really why she should have been passed by; she possessed kindly blue eyes, plenty of soft, pretty grey hair, which cannot always have been grey. She was bright and intelligent, but, unfortunately, had not the least idea how to make the best of herself.

Her hair was scraped back from her face and screwed up in a tight knob at the back of her head, much after the fashion usually adopted when about to wash. If some of this had been pulled forward to make a soft frame for her good little face, it would have made all the difference in the world in her appearance.

Certainly this pathetic little woman need not have been unattractive had she known how to be otherwise. It struck me that the way she dressed might be the outward and visible sign of an inward despair—that nothing mattered any more, and now her heart was empty and yearning.

What tragedies there are hidden away in the lives of those around us! This nice old lady wished to be in the midst of the hurly-burly of the busy moving world; instead of living in her stagnant backwater, she wanted to enter into the strife and struggle. All I could do was to suggest that backwaters were peaceful.

Having a receptive mind, I wondered she had not struck out some line of her own to fill her empty life. Circumstances had placed these ladies on the fringe of the crowd, where they could dimly see and hear the busy throng, but were, or thought they were, unable to take part in the jostle. They were well off, and it seemed sad they could not find contentment and happiness.

The train came in. My late hostess stood at the



carriage door wishing me good-bye. Once more she said: "I have so enjoyed your visit. I shall often think of you, but"—rather wistfully—"I don't suppose I shall ever see you again; you will be a ship that has passed in my night." Her eyes were moist as she gripped my hand and bade God bless me.

I felt inclined to be moist myself. Why had she been denied the joy of having a child of her own on whom to lavish her affection, when plenty of women had them and wished them at Jericho?

What about bachelor men? Are they any happier? I wonder. Some of the young ones have a very good time and are happy, but few when they reach the serene side of the leaf and the elasticity leaves their limbs seem happy and content. They cannot amuse themselves with household matters, or make uncomfortable garments for the poor, as some old ladies do, so when ill health comes they are cross and miserable. It is not often that we find bachelors ending their days in sweet temper and tolerance, and most of them have become selfish. They probably feel—

"There's not a joy the world can give  
Like that it takes away."

But they still have wine and tobacco, which not many old maids indulge in, and also they sometimes have housekeepers to amuse them!

Then Sisters of Mercy. Some of them are happy, I verily believe; it is written on their faces. They seem to have found the peace that passeth all understanding, though, if we may believe all we hear, there are occasional little jealousies even in religious strongholds, little rifts in the lute. After a time I have noticed the constant living under severe self-repression and endless rules, with neither time nor

place for personality, leaves its mark, their expression becoming immobile and masklike.

I wonder, do they hide themselves from the world because they feel that thus they can serve their Master better? Or is it because they fear temptation, have not the pluck to face the music?

The clergymen must come next. They are mostly happy, because they are so convinced that they are doing right, viewed by the code they themselves compile. They take no thought of the material, worldly to-morrow, except perhaps as regards their promotion. Do they, I wonder, ever calmly sit down to judge their own judgment?

It is rather hard on the clergy that they should be expected to be more than human, but from their self-imposed position, having chosen to live more or less in the light of day, they must, of course, walk with circumspection.

The French say there are three sexes : men, women, and clergy. Many sky-pilots do splendid work, especially in the big cities, where they are in daily contact with most of life's phases ; it makes them more tolerant, less inclined to quarrel with the route chosen by their flock so long as they can gather in the lost, stolen, or strayed, than is often the case with country parsons.

In some of my enthusiastic moments I have thought I would love to be the wife of one of these grand God-loving men, who grow old with other people's sorrows, whose hearts are large and saintly—one of those clergy worthy of the name, who love every one of their flock, the worst sinners perhaps the best of all. The faith of these good shepherds is so splendid their reason has to be subservient to it.

The love-making of the clergy is usually most orthodox ; everything must be carried out with a good

deal of red tape. At first the love-making is lamblike, naturally, as they grow older, it becomes more sheepish.

While on the subject of the clergy I should like to tell you some stories about them, but think they deserve a fresh chapter.