VARIOUS

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL OF POPULAR LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND ART, NO. 725, NOVEMBER 17, 1877

Various

Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art, No. 725, November 17, 1877

Various

Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art, No. 725, November 17, 1877 / Various — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Various
Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art, No. 725, November 17, 1877

EXPERIENCES OF A KNOCKER-UP

Some time ago, while paying a professional visit at the house of a small tradesman in the town of B – , in the north of England, I made the acquaintance of an interesting old woman, who upon the occasion in question was nursing the tradesman's wife. There are persons, especially of the gentler sex, who will not be said Nay in their attempts to win your confidence; and such was Mrs Waters, the old lady whom I have named. We became intimate in a few minutes; and circumstances causing me to prolong my visit for several hours, I left the house as familiar with the dame's history as if I had known her for many years.

I have styled her an interesting woman. So she was. Her appearance, I grant, was not attractive. She bore no trace of beauty; neither had she refinement either of speech or manner, being somewhat brusque and hasty both in word and action; yet there was an irresistible power in the rapid glance of her large bright eyes; and although at first you might be led to believe, from the hastiness which marked all her movements as she attended to the requirements of the house and family, that she must be harsh and unfeeling in her disposition, she was really one of the kindest and most tender-hearted of women. I soon found out that she was a neighbour, and that she possessed independent means, which she had acquired by her own unaided industry; that she had also maintained an invalid husband for years, and had educated and given a profession to her only son and child.

I resolved to become better acquainted with the old dame; and as I did not scruple to put questions, I gleaned from her what shall form the subject of the present paper. Her designation as a 'knocker-up' will become plain as I proceed. In reply to an inquiry she said: 'O dear, no! I am not unwilling to tell you how I made my independency. Why should I be? An honest woman need not be afraid of anything. I made it, sir, by knocking-up; every penny of it. Ay, you may well look surprised, for I fancy you don't know what knocking-up is; or if you do, you are wondering how I could save a fortune out of such a line of action. No; I don't mean to say that I had no other way of making money. I started a shop after I began to knock up; but every penny I made by shopkeeping was spent in keeping my family; and when my son was put to business, some of my otherwise-made money went along with it; but every penny which I put by, and the income on which I now live, was got by knocking-up.

'You may well ask how I, a woman, should ever have thought of such a means of living, or should have ventured upon it. Well, to tell the truth, I never thought of it; that is, I did not invent it; it was brought before me; and I was in too great need to be very nice. I believe I was near the first, if not the very first who earned money by regularly knocking up; at anyrate I knew of none who were in that line. The thing was brought about in this way. My husband was a delicate man from our first acquaintance. And he was, bless you! as different from me in spirit and ways as a summer day is from a winter day. He had hardly a morsel of *fend* in him. I've often wondered what we should have done, or what would have become of us, had it been I that had been laid up instead of him. But you see, sir, Providence had a hand in the matter. It was well in many ways, I may say in all ways, that he was afflicted; for you see had it been *me*, what an ill-tempered impatient creature I should have been.

'Was it an illness that fell upon him which laid him aside, do you ask? No; not exactly; I'll tell you. We had been married about six years, and our son was about four years old, when Waters happened on a misfortune; he was in the act of lifting a heavy weight in the foundry in which he worked, when something snapped or gave way in his back. He was brought home between two men;

and from that day until his death, more than fifteen years afterwards, he never did a stroke of work. Poor fellow!

'Yes; you're right; the knocking-up scheme followed. It was very singular. I had been down to the foundry one Friday evening for the bit of pay which the masters kindly allowed him for a while, when I got into conversation with one of the better sort of men who were employed in the works. I said to him that I believed I should have the home to keep over our heads, and that I was willing to do anything that would help therein, when he said quite suddenly like: "If you will knock me up at three o'clock every morning but Sunday, I will give you half-a-crown a week." At first I thought he was joking; but when I saw that he was sincere, I closed in with the offer; for something said within me that that would be the beginning of something better still.

'The reason why knocking-up is so widespread nowadays is this: people soon get so used to the alarum-clock that it fails to awake them, or if it awake them, they are at times so sleepy that they drop off again before the alarum runs out. This was the case with the person who asked me to awaken him; he had lost many mornings through over-sleeping the time. He was in the designing line; and he said he got more work done and of a better sort during the quiet hours of morning than at any other time. At anyrate this was his statement, though afterwards another reason was assigned for his habit; so he was anxious to be up at three o'clock. Well, I engaged with him; and a good thing it was for me, for before a year had gone over my head I had thirty customers of the like kind. No; not for the same hour in the morning, nor for the like pay – begging your pardon – but mostly for the time between five and six o'clock.

'I have no objection whatever to tell you what I used to earn; why should I? But let me tell you first how I went on adding to my business, if I may call it a business. At the end of the first year, as I have said, I had thirty customers. Year by year they went on increasing, until at the end of five years I had near eighty houses to go to; and for the thirty years that I followed knocking-up after that – thirty-five in all – I never fell below that number. Sometimes I had as many as ninety-five. What did they pay? All prices. When I got a few more early customers in addition to my first one, I knocked him a shilling a week off; for I could not fashion to take half-a-crown. So all who were knocked up before four o'clock paid me eighteenpence a week; those who had to be awakened soon after four gave me a shilling a week; whilst those who had to be aroused from five to six o'clock paid from sixpence to threepence weekly, according to time and distance. Of course the greater number of customers belonged to the threepenny class.

'You can't see how I managed to get through so large a number of houses in so short a time? But I did, at anyrate. I found system to be a needed thing, you may be sure. Then I found out near cuts to different neighbourhoods. And I took care not to let the grass grow under my feet. Besides, I fancy I had a knack of rousing my employers in a short time. Perhaps *my* knock or ring or way of tapping was more effective than that of other knockers-up. However that may be, I got through my engagements morning by morning. I see you are eager to get at my weekly earnings. Well, I'll keep you no longer in suspense. For thirty years I never earned less than thirty shillings a week; mostly thirty-five; and when I had a good lot of far-away or very early customers, I picked up as high as forty shillings in a week. You stare; but what I say is true. Two pounds a week for summoning folks to their work, of a morning.

'I am not a very strong or healthy body now; how can a woman of seventy years expect to be without ache or pain after a life like mine? But for thirty-five years wherein I followed the knocking-up line I never had what may be called a badly day. Bless you, sir, I hadn't time to be laid up! I believe my early rising, and the exercise in the open air, kept me in health; and when bits of cold got hold of me, why, my spirits did much towards helping them off again. Spirit, sir, is everything! Did I go to bed during the day? Never! I could not afford the time; for I had my shop to mind. You look surprised; but I told you at the beginning that I kept a shop. See you; I did not know how long my husband might linger; and then I was so wrapped up in my poor lad, that I determined he should be

a doctor or a lawyer, or something smarter than a tradesman; so, having a good long day before me, I resolved upon opening a shop of some kind.

'I was a time in deciding on what I should deal in. I dreaded giving credit; and as there are some things which women are not in the habit of buying on *tick*– somehow they never think of that when they really want them – I resolved to deal in them. So I hit upon selling black-lead, blacking, brushes of various kinds, even pots and pans; for I noticed that when a woman sent for such things she sent the money for them. Besides, I saw that a matter of ten pounds or so would start me in that line; I saw that there would be little perishable stock or articles that would go out of fashion; nor would the business call for a deal of learning or knowledge to manage it – things which I had not; so into that line I went.

'At first I managed to make my cottage do for my shop; the bedroom and cellar I made into the warehouse; then as the trade increased I took the house next to the one I had, and made it into shop and warehouse. Rent and taxes, you know, were not heavy items. I began this business after I had done knocking-up about five years, and ended it about six years ago.

'No; I did not give up because I was tired of work. But I saw that I had enough to live upon, and' (here her voice fell into a low key, and assumed a plaintive tone) 'I had no one belonging me to live for; for my husband had been long dead, and my poor son had been taken from me. Did I sell my business? No; I did not sell either business. There was a poor man, a neighbour, who fell out of work; and as he had a large family, and was running from bad to worse at his shop every week, I just handed over the knocking-up to him; and a good thing it has been for him, you may be sure. And as for the other concern, why, I just let my customers spread themselves among other shops as they thought fit.

'Did I make many bad debts in the knocking-up business? Not many; less than you would suppose. But for one thing, I looked pretty sharp after my money. It took some gathering in, though. I got paid mostly on a Saturday afternoon and night. Some called and paid me as they passed my house; others left it with those appointed by me to receive it. One way or other, I got most of it week by week. To those who began to be dilatory in paying me, I just gave a hint that if they did not pay up that week-end I would let them overlie themselves a morning now and again. This put them into fear; for they knew they would lose a deal more by being 'quartered' once at the mill than they had to pay me for a whole week's knocking-up. So I had few who did not pay up old scores. Of course I leave out of account some I did not care to press for payment – men with large families, or men who had had a fit of sickness or the like, or a poor delicate woman. But let that pass; they might have done the same by me.

'Yes; a knocker-up has a good chance of finding out the tempers of his customers. Bless you! I soon got to know who were surly and who were pleasant folks; who were short-tempered and who had long tempers. You know, when knocking-up began to be a regular trade we used to rap or ring at the doors of our customers. But there were two objections to this way of rousing them: one from the public, the other from the knocker-up. The public complained of being disturbed, especially if sickness was in a house, by our loud rapping or ringing; and the knocker-up soon found out that while he knocked up one who paid him, he knocked up several on each side who did not pay; so we were not long in inventing the fishing-rod-like wands which are now used. Ay indeed, the knocker-up has a wand of office. I was among the first who adopted rods. So now a few taps on the bedroom window, which no one hears but those who should, are sufficient.

'A surly or hot-tempered fellow would growl or knock things about as he came to the window to reply, and his responding rap would sound as peevish as possible; but a good-tempered man, ah it used to be quite pleasant and cheering to get *him* out of bed; for you could hear from his very tread that he was grateful even, and his reply-tap sounded quite musical; and when he spoke and bade you good-morning, it was really encouraging. I have been inclined at times to knock some men up for nothing, just because it was pleasant to hear them, especially after you had had two or three of the other kind to deal with. I have given over knocking some fellows up for no other reason than that they were sulky or angry at being disturbed. There was one man in particular: he was a little, slender, ill-

featured man, who always reminded me of a weasel; he had to be up at five o'clock; he was given to drink, by the way; so that he was not only hard to awaken, but he never came to the window but he indulged in angry mutterings, and I heard at times an oath slip out of his mouth. He was a shilling-a-week customer, and paid regularly; but I was so plagued by his temper and insulting ways, that at last I gave him up as a bad job.

'You are right, sir; a knocker-up really deserves the gratitude of his customers. They should not think he is compensated when he gets their money. Only think: he has to be out of his warm bed in all weathers; and must not let a bit of tic or tooth-wartch keep him at home. But *they* can sleep on the night through, in peace and content, because they are sure to hear his taps on their window at the right time. Really, I'm sure nobody can think a knocker-up is a selfish man, or for that part of it, a selfish woman. Why, no money is so well spent as that which is paid to the profession; and I believe most who pay it think so.

'I knocked up for years two young women who were sisters. They had been left orphans when very young; but poor things, they stuck together, went to the mill, saved their earnings, and at last took and furnished a room. They got me to knock them up; for you see they kept their own little spot clean and tidy, and mended their own things at night; and they went to bed tired and often late; so they slept heavy. Well, as I've said, I knocked them up for years. They would not let me do it for nothing; no, not even now and again. One or the other had always a "Good-morning," or "How are you this morning, Mrs Waters?" in a low kind tone for me. And about once a quarter they would have me spend a Sunday evening with them and take a cup of tea; and if any folks were grateful it was these girls.

'When did I get my sleep, do you ask? I'll tell you. I always went to bed at nine o'clock every night, except Saturday night; and having a tired body and a contented mind, I was not long in dropping asleep. And I was up again at half-past two to the minute; for my first customer lived a good twenty minutes' walk from my house, and you know he had to be awakened at three o'clock. Well, for some time I had no one else to arouse until four o'clock, so I generally came home. Before I went out in winter I got a cup of tea, so I kept the fire in; but in summer I let it go out, and did not care to light it again until I came back from the early customer. Then I always made my poor husband a cup of tea, after which he slept better than in the fore-part of the night. You see *he* had to awaken *me*; for being young and very active during the day, I slept soundly. But what between him and the alarum, I never over-slept myself; no, not even once. But after I had been about six or seven years at the job, I got to awaken quite naturally like. It was well I did; for when my husband died, I had no longer him to depend on.

'Yes; the worst weather for a knocker-up is wet weather. Oh, it was trying to one's patience, to say nothing of one's health, to be pelted with rain and wind. Then when the streets were filled with snow-broth it was anything but pleasant. But I always tried to think of the good I was doing. What a wonderful help it was to think that way! Why, I found out that even a chimney-sweep or a sweeper of our streets would be happy in his calling if he only took such a view of his work, instead of comparing it with such as a clergyman's. Why, sir, we are all helping one another as well as earning our livings when we follow our lawful callings. But it was extra nice on a fine spring or summer morning; I used to be happy all over on such mornings.

'You would like me to say something about my son. To tell the truth, sir, I seldom feel willing to talk about him; for when I've been led out to talk about him, my dear lad, it has taken many a day to get his image out of my mind.'

I here besought Mrs Waters not to go on with the story, but she did. It was interesting and touching in some of its details; but as it would not be relevant to the leading subject of this paper, I refrain from relating it. I heard her tell, both then and afterwards, several incidents of great interest; but as my paper is quite long enough already, I must omit them.

Note.– Since the writer of the above article had his conversations with Mrs Waters, he had a long talk with a civil but illiterate man whom he fell in with during a journey by rail. It came out

that he got his living chiefly by knocking-up, having over eighty regular customers, from whom he obtained on an average twenty-eight shillings a week. This was in a town six miles from the scene of Mrs Waters' toils. But like most other money-making avocations, this one has become over-run with competitors, as is evident from the fact that the writer meets in his short early morning walk into the town at least half a dozen knockers-up of both sexes; so that few are now, he believes, so fortunate as either the man above named, or Mrs Waters.

THE ADMIRAL'S SECOND WIFE

CHAPTER XIV. – THROUGH THE GRIM GATES

Five wretched days pass, and Katie hardly knows how they go, for she counts time only by the arrival of the mail-bag. Yet no letter has come from Sir Herbert, and she is almost distracted. Has he really set her free? cast her off? And will he never again come, or send, or speak?

The great house is growing silent and gloomy beyond measure. Though the daily routine of work and attendance goes on as usual, there is a change, and Katie sees it. Servants are beginning to talk; a rumour spreads among them that the Admiral is to be superseded, and that the establishment in Government House will soon be broken up. Perhaps they have gleaned this from the newspapers, which are making very free with Sir Herbert's name just now. They jest at his clumsiness, his mismanagement, and his blunder; they wonder whether he has fallen into dotage. They marvel how a man in his sober senses could send such a miserable craft as the *Leoni* to sea in a storm. Indeed she would have become a total wreck had not the *Leo* while making for the Short Reefs discovered her far out of her course, tossing about on a cross sea, her rudder broken, her decks flooded with water, and her crew in a rampant state of disorder. The old ship was fast going to her doom, like a great blundering unmanageable sea-monster; when the *Leo* took her in tow and brought her into harbour.

On the evening of this fifth day, Katie watches till the last post comes in, till the last train has stopped, and there is no longer any chance of hearing from or seeing her husband that night. Then her powers of endurance fail; waiting becomes agony, her punishment seems greater than she can bear. The silence is killing her; she feels as if she must go mad, or die. Her brain throbs so wildly, her mind is in such tumult, that she is hardly responsible for her actions. She rushes up to her room, puts on an outdoor dress, and with her veil closely drawn over her face, is only conscious she must flee from the house. It is so quiet, *so* lonely; the very atmosphere suffocates her.

'I will go home to my mother; she will pity me, and calm my burning brow with her cool soft hand,' is her thought, as she almost runs across the hall and out of the door. She never notices the night is cold, that long white icicles are hanging from the trees, and that the ground is hard and frozen. She sees not the stars glittering down at her with their clear holy eyes; nor does she observe the grave questioning looks of the sentries as they notice the Admiral's wife flee out of the gates alone at that late hour.

A strange contrast that silent stealthy departure, to Kate's triumphant entry through those very gates not twelve months ago. Her reign in Government House has been short, its termination sudden and inglorious, for she is doomed never to enter the stately portals again. She walks rapidly on through the streets, shivering, but not from the keen air, for her whole frame is in a burning fever, and the chill breeze feels like a blast from a blazing furnace. Soon Katie is standing on the threshold of the well-known room in the old house, scaring all the inmates with her wan face and wild looks. Mrs Grey is at her side in a moment.

'Katie, my child, what's the matter? Are you ill?'

'Mother, mother! I have come home to you again. Don't send me away, I entreat you. Herbert has left me, deserted me!'

In another moment she is on a stool at her mother's feet, with her face buried in her lap, sobbing a wild resistless storm of tears. Mr Grey, with his spectacles raised on his forehead, looks down on his child curiously. He would begin questioning her at once, but his wife cautions him to silence till the burst of tears abates and the sobs become fewer.

'Katie, what's all this about?'

'Herbert is gone! I shall never see him again!'

'Surely nothing has happened to the Admiral? Be calm, child, and tell me what all this means.'

'He went to London, father.'

'I know. He wrote to me on his arrival there.'

'But he went away in anger; parted from me never to return.'

'Katie, I can't understand you. Compose yourself, and explain.'

Lady Dillworth recognises the voice of authority so potent in the old days, and yields to it by passively producing the Admiral's letter. Her father's brow clouds as he reads it over, and there is stinging contempt in his voice as he exclaims: 'So, my Lady Dillworth, you have been flirting with Walter Reeves again!'

Kate is on her feet in an instant, and confronts him with eyes that flash through her tears.

'I have done nothing of the sort, father; that is all a mistake. What do you take me for? I am Sir Herbert's wife, remember.'

'Then how am I to understand this letter?'

Katie explains. She does not attempt to shield herself, nor hide any single particular; and her father softens when he finds she has been more thoughtless than intentionally culpable. Still he speaks out his mind, and says with a husky voice that trembles with emotion: 'A short time ago I gave my daughter to a brave good man, whose only fault was over-indulgence; and before the end of one short year, I find she has grieved him with her folly, injured him with her thoughtlessness, and finally driven him from his home. – Now, don't interrupt me, Katie. Have you ever read of the foolish woman that "plucketh down her house with her hands?" *You* have done that.'

The room is silent, except for Helen's sobs. Katie stands like one frozen to marble while her father heaps reproaches on her head. She feels she has given cause for them, and raising her hands with passionate eagerness, exclaims: 'Help me, help me, father! Tell me what I can do. I would give my very life to set things right again.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.