



by
The Hon. Lady Fortescue.

IF this tempestuous weather continues much longer we shall become a bitter and blaspheming nation, it is really appalling the effect that perpetual rain and wind—particularly wind—has upon even the most placid and sweet-tempered people. Here is an illustration.

I came in from what was once a garden and is now a marsh, after a short tour of inspection. I splashed around my flower-beds, searching for signs of the thousand anemones presented by a friend to edge my herbaceous border, and, after a careful examination, came to the conclusion that those little sprigs of parsley swimming in brown soup must be the foliage of my anemones. Slipping and sliding along the paths, my whiskers storm-blown into my eyes, my nose frozen with cold, I found a few rash flowers appearing above ground—a wilting snowdrop, a mud-splashed crocus. Did I see in them signs of hope and spring? Oh no! I merely felt a pitying contempt for them, because they hadn't the sense to stay underground.

Chilled to the marrow, feeling thoroughly dispirited, soured and irritable, I decided that I had had enough of it. Entering my drawing-room through the loggia on the south side—built by two foolishly optimistic people who hoped to sun themselves therein—I was preceded by a wild gust of wind which tore the door from my hand, eddied madly round the room, upsetting two vases of flowers, and sending all the correspondence and notepaper of a friend who was peacefully writing, up into the air and across the room like a flight of sea-gulls.

You -----y wind! she said, with quiet but intense ferocity, apostrophising the wind as a personal enemy.

Now this woman is quite the gentlest, sweetest and most conventional woman of my acquaintance. She deplores the lax manners and methods of speech of the younger generation, and never, never before has she been heard to swear!

Her unexpected outburst completely restored my sense of humour. If *she* could be so shaken out of her usual correct demeanour by a gust of wind—the climax of months of poisonous weather—there was more excuse for my own bad temper. I was even able to laugh when my husband, coming in with a friend, rain-soaked and plastered with mud, opened the conversation before he was half through the door with "This infernal wind! Will it *never* stop? I've been collecting tiles from the roof, and the gardener says our choice Spanish broom is torn to pieces. And this d-----d rain! One of the pure-bred Wyandotte pullets has developed chest trouble and must be killed—we can't even put it in the pot!—and the others are staggering drunkenly about in a lake of water with muscular trouble in the legs! What can you expect with this-----weather?" He takes it as a personal affront.

The quiet man with him nodded sympathetically, remarking that it certainly was a climate best suited for root-crops—or slugs, snails and willow-trees.

A flapper then entered. "This weather is perfectly damnable, isn't it?" she enquired, irritably, "look at my stockings!" Her legs were spattered with mud above her high rubber gum-boots.

And then the stream of imprecations burst forth once more in chorus.

At the end of November, weary of the English climate, we journeyed down, to the Italian Riviera in search of sunshine. We stayed in Bordighera, in that land of reputed flowers and sunshine, for three weeks. It was bitterly cold. It rained piteously every day but three, mists obscured the mountains, and the sea was grey. Then, one morning, we woke to a blinding blue glare. Startled, I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. Still drowsy, for one mad moment I imagined that we had been transported to Switzerland during the night. The ground was covered with deep snow, the great palms were laden with it, the flowers were completely buried in it, and the mountains—even the *Tete de Chien*—were white and sparkling like those of the Swiss Alps.

It was the first snow-storm known in the Riviera for at least thirty years—and, of course, we had come in for it! Our hostess was almost in tears—all her lovely flowers blackened and frozen to the roots. Never was there such wholesale devastation wrought in one night. The peasants were wringing their hands, their flower-crop killed at the outset of their season. It was pathetic to see them shovelling away the snow from the carnation-terraces and bringing out their blankets and bedding to try to protect their flowers from further frost. If it did not freeze again there was still hope for some of the plants. But it *did* freeze next night, twelve degrees of frost were reported in the morning. Ruin!

We fled from the Riviera, and arrived in Paris to find the city a sheet of ice. The Gare du Nord was deserted, not a taxi would venture into the station yard. I skated forth in quest of one, and at length, by dint of bribing him enormously, he drove us dangerously to our hotel. We could not approach it nearly, for the sloping avenue was frozen like glass, and a horde of porters and *tialets-de-chambre* were obliged to come from the hotel and collect our luggage. Never shall I forget that procession of men carrying my ark and the other baggage—sliding, sitting down violently, sprawling with the luggage on the pavement, cursing and laughing!

We reached England and were greeted by the great snow-storm and had to be dug out of our house in Hertfordshire. Since then, eternal rain and wind. To-day has been sunny. A stock-dove cooed hopefully in the wood. Perhaps—at last—"the winter of our discontent" is over! Let us listen to the weather-report on the wireless—

"Further outlook, cold! and unsettled!"

D---N!