A WOMAN LIVED IN MAN'S ATTIRE

Catherine Coombs is entitled to the unique distinction of being a woman who has for forty-three years successfully masqueraded in male attire, and under the name of "Charley Wilson," worked with men in the masculine trade of a painter. Through an accident her sex was discovered, and she is now in the West Ham Union, London, where she was recently interviewed by the London Telegraph, which prints her strange story:—

Dressed in the simple uniform of the West Ham Union of blue linen, with white apron and cap upon her short iron gray hair, Mrs. Coombs entered briskly and alertly and would certainly not have been set down as more than fifty years of age, though she is over sixty-three. She is by no means tall, and in her masculine garb must have appeared both short and slight. Her voice sounded unusually deep for a woman, but as she explained in subsequent conversation, she had cultivated its lowest registers, till she had come to use them habitually; and she also expresses herself with a terseness and vigor not quite characteristically feminine. She was not disposed at first to speak fully of her life, saying, modestly, that to some it might not seem a very edifying one; but by degrees, and with the help of a leading question or two, she unfolded her extraordinary history, and as she talked it became evident that she had enjoyed considerable educational advantages. To her possession, in fact, of these is due the unhappy beginning of her life.

As she explained, she was born at Axbridge, in Somersetshire, of comfortably circumstanced parents, who sent her to the Cheltenham Ladies' College, which half a century ago, held, as it does to-day, a leading place among girls' schools, and while there she was far better taught than were the majority of girls at that time. It has been stated that her husband was a curate, but that is not the case. He was a schoolmaster and a cousin of her own, considerably her senior. Thinking that her knowledge would be of assistance to him in teaching, he pressed for a very early marriage, which proved a disastrously unhappy one, until his efforts to live upon her parents, and his personal violence to her, compelled her not only to leave him, but to take steps to prevent his ever finding her again.

Then it was that the problem of existence presented itself. There were not the "openings for women" five and forty years ago that there are to-day, and, to put it in her own words, she saw that the choice lay between a man's clothes and labor and destitution. She elected the former, and, but for an accident, would probably have carried her secret to her deathbed. She succeeded in effecting an outward transformation in humble lodgings at a Birmingham coffee house. Her next step was to find work, and she started as a learner in the house painting trade at four shillings a week. Her aptitude soon showed itself, and after three weeks this modest remuneration was raised, until in a few months she was able to earn a "living wage." In the earlier days of her career she worked a great deal in Yorkshire, and bore her part in the internal decorations of many of the finest mansions of the landed and titled people there.

I interrupted her narrative to ask if she had never felt afraid in these times of some gesture or inadvertent speech that would betray her to her "mates," and her answer showed how well she turned the power of observation to account.

"I knew I must never lapse into carelessness," she said, "and how little it would take to give me away, from a very small episode. We had our luncheon while we were decorating a fine house, and the gardener, thinking to give us a treat, brought in a basket of choice apples. He was in a hurry, however, and to those at the further end of the hall he threw the apples, and a young boy, sitting down, who, I suppose, had been in the habit of wearing an apron at his work, extended his knees apart to make a lap in which to catch the fruit. There was an old Yorkshire foreman close beside him, who at once laughed at the boy, and said, 'Yon lad's learnt how t' wenches play.' I had played cricket, so I knew how to catch mine, but I did not forget the lesson."

"Charley Wilson" went twice to Paris on special jobs for "his" employers, and had an exceedingly good offer on one occasion to go to America.

Perhaps the most remarkable fact of this woman's business capabilities was her employment for over thirteen years by the Peninsular and Oriental Company. It is with considerable pride that she mentions that, with the exception of the last two or three ships built, there is not a vessel in that stately fleet which cannot show her handiwork. She had a large share in the redecoration of the saloon of the Rome after the big alterations that were made in her hull for her improvement. The ornamentation of the music saloons of the Victoria, the Oceana and the Arcadia, which are especially elaborate and rich, was almost entirely carried out by her in enamelling, and this, it should be added, is rather a distinct branch of the painter's craft, for, as she says, "a ship's painter may paint a house, but a mere house painter can't paint a ship." During her engagement by the firm who did this work for the company, and subsequently when the Peninsular and Oriental Company did its own painting, she enjoyed a particularly good character for her punctuality in arriving at her work in the morning.

"But how did you bring yourself to talk as men talk when they are alone?" I asked.

"Well, you see," she answered, "I never mixed with them. From the first I saw my safety would lie in maintaining a rather proud, rather 'stand-off' demeanor. My work, I may say without vanity, was so good that that was my claim to the master's notice. The men wondered a little who I could be that chose to keep so much to myself, and so they dubbed me 'the gentleman painter.'"

As Mrs. Coombs talked, it was easy to see that she held strongly religious and devout opinions, though without any ostentation or tendency to obtrude them, and in this way, too, she could save herself from offence. "I have often," she continued, "had to speak my mind out straight when a man working under me has been lazy or careless, but I can safely say I have never used a blasphemous word or an expression that would be jarring on a woman's lips. And as far as talk about me went, I never hesitated to show that I disliked coarse and irreverent and vulgar conversation."

"Again, as you say you were sent often to the country on jobs, how did you manage for lodgings?" I inquired.

"Now that I look back," she answered, "it does seem remarkable that I never once found it inevitable to sleep in the same room with a man. I used to go to cottages, rather than to public houses, for, though I have never been a teetotaler, the accommodation of the village inn is often very objectionable. One time when I was on some work in South Kensington, I met a man I had known, and he said, 'Charley, old chap, there's a first rate thing some of us are going down to. It's near West Grinstead—the whole of Sir William Burrell's mansion to be decorated, and there's a vacancy still." I hesitated a little, but it seemed a good thing, so I offered myself and went. We all got down there, and while they were sitting round their lunch I strolled out, saw a nice old fellow smoking over a gate, and said, "Know where I could get a room? I'm here for the painting of the big house.' 'Don't know as we couldn't do with you ourselves,' and he took me in and showed me a clean and comfortable room, which I immediately engaged, and, fearing lest any of my companions would want to share it, I said I would have 'my wife' down also and my niece; and I had as healthy and comfortable a summer in the country as you could have wished."

Working at Kingston in the summer, she fell from a scaffolding and fractured some ribs. She made a good recovery, and no suspicion even then was raised as to her sex by the doctor who set them and attended her, any more than it had been when she fell down a ship's hatch and fractured her kneecap. On this occasion, however, the doctor had said one day, "What curiously small hands you have for a man, Wilson." Looking, too, at them, well formed and even white, it is almost a wonder that these never did raise any inquiry. But her savings were soon exhausted, and, for the last few weeks, work was unobtainable. For two days and two nights this brave-hearted woman tramped the streets with no more than a halfpenny roll to eat, and at last she was fain to seek the shelter of the workhouse. She clung to the hope that somehow she might evade the compulsory stripping, but it was impossible, and feminine modesty revolted even to yielding up the secret she had kept so long.

"But I have hope that I shall not have to stay here long," she piteously said. "My eyesight is not as good as it was, and I fear I shall not be able to undertake high class painting work again, but I could act as caretaker, I could keep a lodge and should be very thankful if I could hear of any position of trust. I am doing my best while I am here, and the matron is very kind to me, giving me only some stockings to darn and sheets to hem, instead of sending me to scrub or wash. And I feel very uncomfortable in these clothes, though you would not find me wanting any half-and-half 'bloomers' if I can't have my old coat and trousers."

WANT OF TACT.

Never say too much. Manners go a great way, and delicate matters managed with tact can be carried out without the slightest blow to the sensitive feelings of the parties concerned. It is not tact to rush up to a person and say; "How ill you are looking." Anyone who is not feeling well generally knows all about it, and does not like to be reminded of the fact. On the contrary, in meeting anybody who is looking particularly well or handsome, then is the time to speak. To be able to keep people in good humor and never rub them the wrong way shows a wonderful amount of tact, but how many people there are who are always doing or saying the wrong thing. Two old school friends who had not seen each other in years met again a short time ago, and almost immediately after the first words of greeting had been exchanged, the one exclaimed to the other; "Why, you look as if you had been crying for years; your face is so wrinkled." Now that remark, to say the least, did not show tact, and in a measure it destroyed the old feeling of affection which had existed for so many years. People do not like to be told disagreeable facts, but when an unpleasant truth must be told, to use a little tact in the telling of it will make the hurt less deep. Say and do pleasant things in this world whenever it is possible, but if disagreeable ones come to the surface handle them as gently as possible to spare the feelings of others.

AGRICULTURAL

AT THE OLD FARM.

A scent of hay,
A cattle call
A whir of wings,
And peace o'er all.
At the old farm.

My mother's song
At break of morn
A robin's lay,
The breakfast horn.
At the old farm.

A running brook,
A meadow sweet,
A laughing boy
With naked feet,
At the old farm.

A leafy wood
Adown the glen,
Remote from sight
And sound of men,
At the old farm.

The kitchen's glow
In hearth-fire's cheer,
A dreamy tale,
A smile, a tear,
At the old farm.

A downy bed
The attic in,
And boyhood's sleep,
No fear, no sin,
At the old farm.

NUT GROVES.

More interest should be taken in nut-bearing trees, and a grove of this character should be started on every farm. There is a general opinion that they are slow of growth and that it will seldom pay to set them out. This is a mistake, and if pains be given as to culture and the soil is fertile the rate of growth is quite rapid, even in the case of the oak, and good results can be obtained from acorns if they are properly planted and cared for. Rapid growth does not depend so much on variety as upon supplied conditions, such as subsoiling before planting, applications of manure, and after-culture until the roots become sufficiently established to draw well from the soil and be independent of surface conditions. For success in the line indicated by our correspondent's inquiry we would advise deep plowing this fall and making the grove strip a long one. The nuts should be taken fresh from the hull when ripe and placed in shallow trays of sand in the proportion of not over one-third nuts to two-thirds sand. This should be slightly dampened with water so as to be in an average state of moisture, or about as the soil is when in a condition for the best growth of vegetation. The peach or pear boxes found at the stores may be used for the trays, which it is best to keep covered with wire netting to prevent mice getting in. They should be placed on the floor of a damp cave and covered with moist earth until the ground begins to freeze up for winter. Then remove them and bury outdoors a little deeper than the boxes, say five or six inches, cover with fresh earth, and top out the mound with a foot of well moistened straw. This latter point is important, as the straw next the ground should not dry out and let the frost get into the boxes and freeze the nuts all winter.

As soon as the frost is out of the boxes in the spring, generally the latter part of March, and when the surface of the plowed plot is dry, with the frost showing at a depth of about four inches, plant the nuts in rows four inches deep and eight feet apart, six to eight nuts to the hill, sticking a small stake beside each hill. Eight or ten days after the nuts have germinated and thrown up shoots, take a rake and remove the dirt from the starting shoot, letting the heat of the sun nearer the germinating nut, and later when the shoots have a good start, draw the earth in around them. After the seedlings show that they are well established, pull out by the roots and destroy all but the best and most vigorous in the hill. We would advise planting the entire plot to soft maple seedlings when the usual planting time arrives in April or May to create a shade as speedily as possible. After these are planted high culture and plenty of manure worked into the soil will be sure to produce a thrifty growth. The soft maples should be allowed to grow for several years to provide forest conditions. They will be beneficial to the nut seedlings because of their shade, and as the maples are shallow rooting when young they will in no way interfere with them. When the nut trees reach the proper size the maples can be thinned and finally removed from the body of the grove; but since hickory trees are subject to borers it would be well to have a strip of maples along the south line of the nut grove. This will throw shade in the grove and on the stems of the nut trees, and, since borers do little or no damage in the shade, will operate as a preventive of these pests. We would also advise the planting of chestnut groves, the nuts being treated in the manner outlined above. There are many chestnut groves in bearing in the West and a nut grove of hickory or sweet chestnuts is possible on any farm. As a general rule trees will grow faster if allowed to remain where the nut is planted, but with the chestnut this does not make so much difference, for it is set back very little by transplanting if the new location given it is made quite rich. However, it is best usually to transplant only one-year seedlings, as they recover quickest from the shock. Walnuts can also be treated in a manner similar to that just described. It is possible to plant nuts outdoors just as they fall, but they need very deep covering to keep them from being injured by the heated surface soil drying the shell and possibly preventing successful germination. Difficulties in this direction can be overcome by deeply covering the nuts in the fall, and in the spring the soil can be temporarily removed over the seed until the shoots rise above the surface.

HOW TO GROW CHERRIES.

Cherries thrive in a variety of soils but attain their highest development in one that is light and loamy. It must retain considerable moisture, but never be sour. If the land is too wet it must be drained and on light dry knolls, otherwise favorable to cherry culture, the moisture holding capacity of the soil may be increased by the addition of vegetable matter and judicious surface cultivation. The turning under of crimson clover, or a crop of similar character is highly beneficial.

The best results are obtained from orchards situated on a western or northwestern slope, as the blooming period is retarded in spring and the danger of frosts greatly lessened. A depression is not desirable, as frost is liable to occur there when it would not on higher ground. Where the country is naturally level, a slight elevation is preferable, since it insures air drainage and good circulation. The sour varieties of cherries seem to thrive better on lower levels than the sweet kinds.

The distance apart for planting trees will depend almost wholly upon the manner of growth. Some trees may attain a height of 40 to 50 ft and be wide spreading. These should stand not less than 30 ft. apart.

The highest success in cherry growing cannot be attained without thorough cultivation during the early life of the orchard and also later while fruit is being matured. There is no objection to growing small fruits or some other crop requiring frequent cultivation between the rows of cherry trees for a few years, provided the land is good and contains enough plant food to keep the trees in vigorous condition. The sweet cherry is a coarse feeder and will thrive on less applied fertilizer than the other kinds. G. Harold Powell, Bulletin 35, Delaware experiment station. When the land is too rich or too much fertilizer is added, the energy of the tree is apt to be devoted too largely to wood growth. An abundance of moisture is essential for cherry trees during the bearing season, especially just before and during the ripening process, consequently it is advisable with a bearing orchard to plow early in spring and follow with light cultivations every ten days or whenever the rain becomes scarce. On the first or middle of July, the condition of the soil can be greatly improved in its water holding capacity by turning under annual crops of crimson clover or some other nitrogenous cover crop. In order to secure this crop sow at the last cultivation 10 or 12 lbs. of crimson clover seed per acre. It is very essential to retain the moisture in the soil in the spring by early plowing and by quite frequent culture. If the trees make too vigorous a growth seed down one year to rye or buckwheat.

The most profitable sour cherries are the Montmorency and Early Richmond and these varieties can be grown in nearly all the orchard fruit regions. The following sweet varieties have been grown with more or less success: Black Tartarian, Robert's Red Heart, Napoleon, Windsor and Dikeman. For this same region, the following may be added for family use: Black Eagle, Mezel, Gov Wood, Coe's Transparent, Knight's Early Black, Yellow Spanish and Louis Philippe.

WATER COWS OFTEN IN WINTER.

To get the best results from cows they must be kept comfortable night and day. It is not necessary to have expensive stables or barns, but their quarters must be warm, well lighted and ventilated. Feed a well balanced ration of roughage and grain. Very few realize the necessity of furnishing plenty of water. As a rule cows in winter quarters get no succulent food. Dry hay, corn fodder and dry grain are their daily ration. A few dairymen water their cows twice a day and a much smaller number have water in the stables. A cow will thrive much better, will drink more and give more milk from the same food if allowed to drink in a warm, comfortable place.

One of the best devices made for watering cows in the stable consists of a V-shaped trough running the whole length of the stable, immediately over the manger and about three and one-half feet above the bottom. It is thus out of the way of cows and attendants. The water can easily be led from a tank or pump directly into the trough. It is necessary that the cow, in addition to the water needed for rumination and digestion have enough to put 87 per cent. into the milk she gives. A cow weighing 1,000 lbs. in full milk should have about 12 gallons of water a day. And if so much water be taken at one time during very cold weather the cow receives a great chill from which it will take hours to recover. Besides, it makes the food in her stomach so liquid that it cannot be raised for rumination. Of course nature soon takes out the surplus but the process continues and the contents become dry and solid. Watered frequently, the same lot of cows will give from 10 to even as much as 20 per cent. more milk on the same food. No one who keeps cows for profit can ignore such a result. It will require considerable work to attend properly to all details in a well managed dairy, but they must be looked after if success is to be attained.

PLANK FRAMING FOR BARNS.

It is customary in framing barns and other heavy farm buildings to use much heavier timbers than are necessary. This is really true, notwithstanding frequent collapses from storms, overloaded mows, etc. The trouble is that the framing is often ill adapted to resist the strains acting on it. We know of one farmer who put 2x12 inch joists on 12 inch centers, 14 ft. span, under a cow stable and in a few months it began to settle, then collapsed. The joists had been cut down 6 inches to let in a trench 4 ft. from one bearing which had been notched up 6 inches into a sleeper. The joists split. Had they been properly cut they would have been there yet.

The ultimate strength of a timber is that of its weakest part. A 6x8 inch post notched to receive a 4-inch brace is weakened almost half. Heavy timbers are used to allow free cutting and notching with safety. Another point is to have the strongest direction of the timber coincident with the greatest stress. A 2x8 inch joist has the same wood in it as a 4x4 inch and is four times as strong. It will bear just 16 times the weight with the narrow side up as with the wide side up. Bearing these facts in mind it is practicable to build a 40x60 barn with a plank frame throughout, but it must be a balloon frame with box sills and built-up posts. It must have inside bearing partitions and be tied across the plates with built-up timber tie beams or rods and bracing done the same as any ordinary balloon bracing. All notching, mortising, etc., should be avoided. Probably no suitable plan could be drawn for any specific case without a knowledge of how many and what kind of cattle are to be housed, capacity of mows, bins, etc.

SAM WAS ALONE.

But From His Tree-Fortress He Did Terrible Execution—A Kentucky Story.

Back of the mountaineer's cabin was a great plum tree, and under this tree was a grave without a headstone. I noticed the mound as I wandered about in the afternoon, but it was evening and we sat at the door smoking our pipes before I made enquiry.

"Yes, that's Sam's grave," replied the old man, as he looked away into the gathering twilight. "Sam was my son—my only son. We buried him there five yar's ago."

I saw from the look which passed between husband and wife that I had touched on a painful matter, and I was about to change the subject when the woman said:

"Joe, he may hev heard sunthin' 'bout it. Better tell the story straight."

"Wall," said the old man, after a long pause, "they had a hoss race up at the Co'ners, and our Sam was thar and got into a dispute with one of the Clay boys. Thar' was five of the Clays, and Sam was all alone. He was only 18 yar's old, but when them Clays begun to elbow him around he stood up to the hull five of 'em. Thar' wasn't no shootin' right thar' at the Co'ners. The Clays waited till Sam had got started fur home, and then rid arter him and opened fire. He had the sense to put his hoss on the dead run and look fur kiver. They followed him right along home, and his hoss was shot as he jumped down at the gate. Mary, yo' tell the rest."

"I was all alone yere," said the wife, "and when I heard the shootin' I knowed what it meant. I got down the Winchester and stood at the door, and as Sam cum up he took it and run to the big plum tree fur kiver. Thar' was five of the Clays, and they dodged about and kept shootin' and paid no 'tenshun to me. I was that scart that I sat down on the ground and kivered up my face with my apron. I can't say how long it all lasted, but I reckon not mo' than ten minits. When the shootin' stopped I got up, and—and—"

"And Sam was lyin' dead under the plum tree!" said the old man.

Tears ran down the face of the woman and the husband's chin quivered, and it was a long minute before he added:

"Yes, Sam was lyin' dead on the ground hit by five bullets, but out thar'—and over thar'—and right out yan fo' o' them Clay boys was lyin' on their backs with their sightless eyes lookin' up at the sky, and the fifth one crawlin' on hands and knees up the road!"

"He had killed four!" I exclaimed.

"Killed fo', sah, and wounded the fifth one till he was a cripple fur life! That was our Sam, sah, and we buried him right whar' he fit and made his record. Fo' dead men on their backs—a wounded man crawlin' away and cryin' as he went!"

"And there were no other Clays?"

"Nary a man nor boy! The wimen had to cum for the dead, and I had to help lift 'em into the cart!"

DICK WAS SMART.

Dick proposed to me last night, confessed Madge to Elizabeth.

Let me congratulate you, for, of course, you accepted him?

No.

You didn't reject him?

Yes.

How did he take it?

Oh, he was perfectly lovely about it, and I almost worship him for it. He said he knew girls liked to have it to say that they have had a great many offers and that he should not despair, but he hoped that when I had refused enough proposals to satisfy me I would intimate the fact to him in some way and then he would propose again and we could be married quietly and settle down. Do you think it would be forward in me to let him know that I have now refused all the offers I care to?