



OPEN LETTERS

The Way to Solve the Servant Question.

TRAIN THE MISTRESSES!

WE hear nowadays a great deal about the trials of housekeeping and the inefficiency of our servants, but nothing about the inefficiency of our housekeepers. Is it not just there that the root of all the trouble lies? Can a woman expect to have a well-ordered household and capable servants, when she, their head and director, is all but ignorant of the first principles of household economy?

Of course the average housekeeper does not acknowledge that she is ignorant; nor does the average mother think any training is necessary to fit her daughter to rule over a household. «My daughter is intelligent,» I have heard mothers say. «She will easily learn by herself what it is natural for all women to know.» Some girls do, but, alas! through bitter experience, with endless discomfort to themselves and others, needless waste of time and money, and often with exhausted strength and shattered nerves. Others never learn. Did one but know the secret history of many a shipwrecked marriage, one would doubtless find that household discomforts and worries, and ignorance in money matters, were the beginning of more serious troubles.

This important part of a girl's education is all but neglected in this country. No matter what our strong-minded «woman's rights» sisters may say to the contrary, woman's real sphere is, and always will be, matrimony and maternity; and household duties fall to the lot of almost every woman, whether she be married or single. What preparation for these inevitable duties do our girls receive?

We do not think of sending our boys out into the world without fitting them for their life's work; yet a daughter is expected to manage a household and bring up a family without the slightest preparation or experience. Totally ignorant, she is placed in a position which requires knowledge, tact, and system, and an executive ability quite as great as is needed for the management of many a business or profession. Our boys work their way gradually into positions of responsibility and trust; but our girls are forced to assume them without any preliminary training. A few lessons in cooking, after a girl's education is supposed to be finished, do not make her an efficient housekeeper. Systematic instruction in sweeping and dusting, washing dishes and cleaning silver, in the mending, washing, and ironing of linen, and the making of fires, as well as in the handling of money and the keeping of accounts,—in fact, the working and the needs of each and every department of a household,—should form part of a girl's education from the time she begins to learn her A B C's. In after life she may never need to put her hand to any of these things; but the knowledge thus gained will be of ines-

timable value in enabling her rightly to judge and intelligently to direct the work of those in her employ. She must be taught that this is as important and necessary a part of her education as her French and music—that it is preparing her for her life's work. Any one who has watched a little girl sweep up the nursery with a toy broom, and witnessed her delight in caring for a doll's house, will realize that the housewifely instinct is natural, and needs only to be judiciously fostered and trained.

As long ago as 1848, Miss Beecher wrote a little book urging mothers and teachers to instruct young girls in the principles and practice of domestic economy; but her words seem to have fallen upon stony places. Physical culture, the neglect of which Miss Beecher also deplored, has made wonderful strides; and women's colleges have sprung up all over the land, testifying to a love of study and a desire for higher education among our women. But are they better versed in household lore than they were fifty years ago?

We have fortunately ceased to think that a rudimentary education and superficial accomplishments suffice for our daughters, and that fancy-work should satisfy their souls; but with this striving for a higher education, a wider sphere, and a more active life, are we not in danger of neglecting duties which lie close at hand? What our women need to learn is that domestic duties are not beneath them; indeed, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu said, «The most minute details of household economy become elegant and refined when they are ennobled by sentiment. . . . To order dinner is not merely arranging a meal with my cook; it is preparing refreshment for him whom I love.»

A woman should regard her household cares as dignified, important, and difficult duties which require her best and most intelligent efforts; not as troublesome, petty annoyances which take her away from more important or more amusing occupations, and which might be avoided if only her servants were better. It is too true that the majority of our servants are ignorant and incapable; but it is not altogether their fault. They cannot learn in their homes what we demand of them; but many an ignorant girl could be made a good servant with a better mistress. When our daughters are thoroughly taught housekeeping and the management of their households, then, and not till then, shall we have capable servants. Efficient service will then be intelligently demanded, and it will be forthcoming; but we cannot hope for it as long as the mistress is more ignorant than her humblest hireling.

A foreign woman now living in this country once told me that she could not understand the ceaseless complaints she heard on all sides of the inefficiency of servants; that, although she came here a stranger to the

language and ways, she had never had the slightest trouble; and she attributed this fact to her thorough domestic training in early life, and her knowledge of what she should demand from her servants. She expressed surprise at the ignorance of the average mistress in this country, and her desire to be rid of all responsibility and care.

It is no wonder that our women take little pleasure in what they do so badly, and grow weary and disheartened when wrestling daily with a problem they cannot solve. But let them once take a more serious view of their household duties, and be better trained for them, and housekeeping will cease to be the trial and bugbear it now is. They will find an interest and pleasure in their work such as they had never known before. As a man laboring for the maintenance of his family has certain hours in the day when nothing is allowed to interfere with his work, so should the wife, his partner, be equally conscientious and systematic in doing her share toward providing for the comfort and welfare of the family. And much could be done to aid and encourage her in these labors if men were more ready to acknowledge her difficulties and appreciate the value of her services. A man works for tangible results, pecuniary or professional, and these act as an incentive. A woman's work in her household savors of the treadmill. A kindly word of appreciation is the only reward she can hope for; and how often does she get it? Comforts are taken for granted, her best efforts are ignored, and too often the only comment upon all her labors is a complaint that the bills are too high. If a woman had the handling of all necessary moneys, the bills would doubtless not be so high. A man requires a certain capital to carry on his business, and would be annoyed beyond endurance were it controlled by another; but the average woman has little or no money she can call her own, and consequently rarely knows how to control her expenditures. With a definite sum at her disposal, a woman will learn to adapt her expenses to her income; and only by seeing the result of small economies, and reaping the benefit of them, can she be taught thrift and the value of money. The habit of charging to her husband everything she purchases robs her of the responsibility of paying, and leads to carelessness and extravagance. A man is placing a woman in an undignified position, to say the least, when he will not trust her with some of his «worldly goods» after «endowing» her so freely with them all.

I do not wish to maintain that our women should become domestic drudges; but they ought to exercise an enlightened and systematic oversight of their households, and realize the importance and dignity of their position. If they could be brought to understand that it is in their own interest to become good housekeepers, perhaps women would give the matter more serious attention. Besides being aware of efficiently fulfilling their destinies, they would be free, in a well-ordered household, from the petty annoyances caused by the shortcomings of ill-trained servants, the countless worries and complications which beset them would be lessened, and they would have more strength and more time for other occupations.

Really competent housekeepers have the most leisure at their command. The training which has taught them

to manage their homes with precision has made them capable of doing good outside work. One woman I have in mind, who was thus trained by a New England mother, takes an interest and pleasure in the humblest details of housekeeping; yet she has found time to assist her boys in preparing for college, has done good literary work, and takes a prominent and efficient part in both charitable and municipal undertakings. Another, not less well versed in the domestic arts, has mastered a difficult branch of science, and her work meets with praise and recognition from those highest in the profession. Competent housekeepers are free from the petty tyranny of the servant who knows she is indispensable—knows that her mistress cannot do the work. How many of our women could, in an emergency, prove their ability to rise above such tyranny, as I heard of a foreign-bred woman once doing? Her husband, a diplomat of high rank, was giving a large official dinner, and just as she was dressing to receive the guests, word came from below stairs that my lady of the kitchen had departed. In those days—some thirty years ago—our caterers were not so many or so efficient as they are to-day, and assistance from outside was not to be thought of; so, hastily summoning her young daughter to take her place and make her excuses, she went to the kitchen, and served her guests with a dinner perfect in every detail. Not until they returned to the drawing-room and found her waiting to receive them did they realize that the «sudden indisposition» had been a ruse, and that the diplomat's wife was a good cook as well as a gracious hostess.

But it is not only the women who have servants and money at their command who need to take a higher view of domestic work. It is the women of all classes and conditions. There is a growing tendency among them all to despise housework, and among the younger generation an alarming ignorance of its first principles. I say alarming, for the evil effects will be serious and far-reaching; and the greatest service our women of leisure could render their sisters of the working-classes would be to make housework fashionable. There are hard-working mothers all over the country who foolishly think that they are bringing up their daughters to be ladies by not allowing them to do any housework. A most pernicious influence in this direction is our daily press. It would be difficult to calculate the wide-spread evil our newspapers work in chronicling the doings of a small set of people, and in giving a senseless and undue prominence to their wealth and amusements. The longing for such a life, all «beer and skittles», and the desire to copy the women who apparently have no duties and no responsibilities, have destroyed the happiness of many a home. The idea that housework is beneath them, and the home sphere too limited, has also flooded the country with art students who will never paint good pictures, and would-be musicians who will never rise beyond teaching unwilling children badly. How many among them—among the countless women working for a living—are fit to marry and care for a family? They almost all look forward to matrimony; and, indeed, this very fact is often used as an argument against employing women instead of men; but what degree of comfort can their husbands hope for, and how can their children become useful men and women?

It is well that women should be self-supporting, and not unnatural that the activity of a professional or business life should attract them; but they can never entirely escape domestic duties, and would not their lives be easier and happier if they were taught in childhood how to meet them?

Another result of this distaste for household occupations is the wide-spread custom of boarding—an American custom which astonishes the foreigner who visits us, and is the ruin of family life. Women of means, incapable of conducting a household, take refuge in hotels and apartment-houses to be rid of the «worry of servants.» Some plead economy as a reason; but if they were willing to give more personal attention to their housekeeping, and would not attempt to emulate their richer neighbors, they might have the comforts and advantages of homes of their own, and still find time for intellectual and social pleasures. Many women with limited means and only a couple of servants expect to run their households on a scale which demands twice that number—to use as much silver and have all the leisure of their richer friends; and they grow disheartened when they fail. One often hears them praise the ease of life abroad; but in foreign countries they are willing to live far more simply, and are not tempted to compete with their neighbors. The benefit to her children in being removed from the baneful influence of hotel and boarding-house life ought to recompense a mother for any extra efforts. If her daughters were obliged to assume some of her duties, they would lessen her cares, and would also gain the experience they so badly need.

The false estimate placed upon housework has likewise lowered the standing of domestic servants in this country. Our native-born men do not hesitate to marry shop-girls or factory-hands; but they consider a girl who has been out at service not their equal socially. Our servants are better paid than any other women, well housed and fed, and sheltered from many of the temptations which surround the working-girl; they are nursed when ill, and not immediately thrown out of employment; and often in old age or prolonged illness are tenderly cared for by their former employers. Yet many a girl will struggle to keep body and soul together on starvation wages rather than incur the stigma of having been a servant. It is doubtless true that girls prefer the greater freedom of shop and factory; and they also have no means of fitting themselves for domestic service.

The majority of our servants are foreign born and bred, and have had their training in their native countries, either as under-servants in large establishments where a professional housekeeper rules, or in modest households where the mistress, often a woman of title and position, is willing to give personal attention to her housekeeping, and is capable of training her servants. The wages they receive are necessarily small, but they look upon the board and lodging they get as sufficient compensation until they are fit to assume more responsible positions.

In our country the housekeepers always demand skilled labor, and in their eagerness to secure it are willing to pay any price. Thus wages have been forced up far beyond the value of the services rendered, and

all but the rich are debarred from having an adequate staff of servants. The supply does not meet the demand, so even the badly trained can secure such prices that the standard of efficiency remains low. Our women of the leisure class, who are singularly devoted to their efforts to aid the suffering and the needy, and to bring some brightness into their lives, can in no way so well further the well-being and happiness of the whole race as in teaching women and girls to take a different view of housework. Well-cooked food and cleanly homes are the best weapons with which to fight the attractions of the saloon, and habits of order and thrift will do more to raise the material welfare of the poor than almsgiving.

Much is being done, but not nearly enough, and not altogether in the right direction. It is the educated, the well-to-do, who must take a different view of household economy. Good mistresses are needed far more than good servants. Let us secure the former, and we shall soon have the latter. But my readers will say: «How can we make our daughters good housekeepers? There is no time for it. The school demands so much that they have all they can do, with their music and dancing and foreign languages besides.»

The real trouble is that household economy is not recognized as a fundamental part of a girl's education. But even in existing circumstances much may be done. In the first place, there are the long summer holidays, when it would be far better if the time were not given up entirely to idleness, and when sewing-classes and cooking-classes might easily be made a source of amusement. Or, in the winter, could not the dancing-class be omitted for a season? and the music-lessons, which are often mere drudgery, and lead to nothing? Then, after school hours, some small task that need not take many minutes should be obligatory each day; and on Saturday mornings, why not teach them to trim lamps, or to clean silver, or to mend the linen and to dust the drawing-room?

Young girls usually like this sort of occupation; and if they do not, the same authority which keeps them unwilling captives at their books and piano could easily insist upon it, if the necessity were once recognized. And let them be taught to look after their own belongings, and not to depend entirely upon a maid.

By the time a girl is fifteen she will thus have learned all the manual part of the workings of a household. Then give her the responsible charge of one and another department. Let it be her duty to see that the drawing-room is properly cared for, or the lamps correctly trimmed. Give her by turns the keys to the wine-cellar, the care of the linen-closet, or the sorting of the week's wash with the supervision of the mending. Later the dining-room can come under her care, and, with a fixed sum at her disposal, let her provide the candles, the fruit, and the bonbons for the table. And then, as she grows older and is emancipated from the school-room, teach her to do the marketing and catering. She will like the authority, if she is not burdened with too much at a time, and is not hampered by too much criticism and interference. The responsibility of having a definite task to perform, with the consciousness that others are dependent upon her, will be great factors in forming her character. She will learn habits of thrift and the

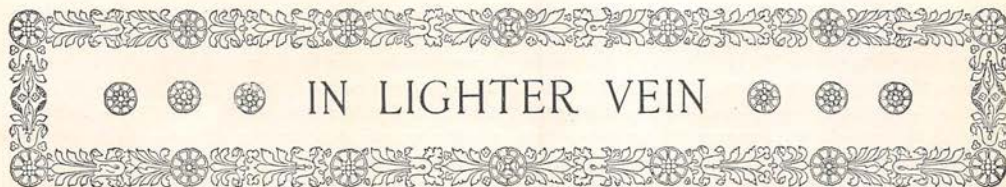
value of money if she is given an allowance and taught to keep accounts. Let it be for small things at first, and gradually be increased to cover the more important items, until she learns to pay for everything she buys. With such a training she will be thoroughly equipped to assume the management of her own household; she will not be forced to submit to the tyranny of inefficient servants, nor made nervous and miserable by cares that are too much for her. How much easier and happier will her life be than that of the average young housekeeper! Cannot mothers see the wisdom of such a course, and realize that this is the way to solve the servant question?

Louise Griswold.

Relics of Lee's Surrender.

MISS ALICE BARBARA STAHL, of Galena, Illinois, states, in behalf of the family of Major Wilmer McLean of Appomattox, that Major McLean did not voluntarily part with the table and other relics of the surrender of General Lee mentioned in General Porter's concluding article in the October CENTURY. It is said that he threw down the ten-dollar bill offered by General Sheridan for the table on which General Grant wrote the terms of surrender, and that the table was subsequently removed by the soldiers, after which Mrs. McLean picked up the bill.

Editor.



IN LIGHTER VEIN

A Graphical Solution.

JUSTIN STURGIS was « shy » a column on Wednesday night, and copy had to be in on Thursday morning, for the « Weekly Whirl » went to press at four o'clock. The « Whirl » was a better paper than any one except the editor and Justin Sturgis knew. It ran good half-tone work, and it not only had the best literary quality of all the papers on the coast, but it would have felt at home in London, so the editor said. It did n't matter much to the editor what news was in the paper, as long as it was briskly written, for he took the « Savoy » and the « Yellow Book » and the « Revue Blanche, » and he went in for the « precious » methods in literature. If there was an actress to be written up (and there's « business » in that very often, what with selling half-tone blocks and extra copies), he hated to have Sturgis go to see her, for fear he would n't get enough sprightly imagination into it; he much preferred to have it done in the office, for Sturgis could turn out « good stuff » if he had to.

The consequence was that Justin got into the way of putting everything off till the last moment, and then working under high pressure. This week the photographs of the « Military Sports at the Presidio » had n't come out well enough to run, and the editor came into Sturgis's room, and told him he 'd have to do about a thousand words to fill space. « Can't you do a good (guy) article? » said the editor. Sturgis had done a stinging skit on « Charity War-Horses » three weeks before, that had set all the society women talking, and the editor had been after Sturgis ever since to write another. « But we must have something by nine o'clock, sure, » he said.

« How about the (American Caricaturists)? » suggested Sturgis.

« Oh, we're not down to that yet, » said the editor, with a grin, as he went out.

The « American Caricaturists » was a sore point with Justin Sturgis. He had written the article with a great deal of care some six months ago, and had looked up

all the illustrations himself, and had had them well reproduced. The whole thing was in type, and had lain in a galley on the stone table up-stairs for almost half a year; but the editor, for some reason, would never run it. « Oh, that 'll wait all right, » the editor would say. « We 'll get in a hole some day, and run her in. It is n't (timely) enough. » So the « American Caricaturists » had become the joke of the composing-room, and it lay on the stone, marked « live matter, » outliving galley after galley of « standing ad's. » Several times the foreman had seen the chief pull a proof of the article with his own hands, and trim it with the long shears, and try to patch it into the dummy, and Justin Sturgis and the foreman would nudge each other, and wait with anxiety. But every time it was « crowded out » by the timely arrival of some dog-show article or other that had been delayed by the « narrow-measure » linotypes.

So Justin Sturgis was « at home » to ideas that evening. But the ideas persisted in staying away. He had sat up all night with himself and a dose of strychnia, — a one-sixtieth-of-a-grain tablet, it was, that was to be an immoral accessory before the fact of his originality.

He thought of all the most romantic things he had ever been interested in: of the fourth dimension; of the impossibility of defining the absolute difference between the right and the left hand; of preëxistence; of the theory that parallel lines *may*, perhaps, meet this side of infinity; of the analogy between atomic motions and the orbits of star systems; of the significance of the lines on the soles of one's feet and the capillary markings on one's thumbs; of conventional moralities, and how they would be affected by a sojourn on an uninhabited island; of the final disposition of mislaid pins; of the effect, if any, of a mucilage cocktail; of pictures painted by blind artists; of the number of bricks in one's house, compared with the number of hairs in one's head; of the absurdity of minus quantities; of the phenomena of semi-nudity in dream; of the euphonious naming of infants; of the geographical center of the United States and the County of San Francisco; of the amount of bird-shot one could swallow without ill effect; and of