

## HOW I ENGAGE MY SERVANTS.



AM sure many people on first reading the heading of this article will exclaim, "How you engage your servants! what a useless subject to write about! of course every one knows how to do that;" and I dare say they will feel greatly surprised when I tell them that, from much experience, I am inclined to believe that very few ladies know how to engage, in a business-like manner, the servants they employ. Before any steps are taken to inquire into character, a definite understanding should be come to, as to the exact terms of what the lawyers call "the contract" between the mistress and servant. On this careful and definite agreement, most of the future comfort of both depends. Nothing is more common than to hear a servant say, "I cannot do so-and-so, it is not my place;" or "I never undertook to do such a duty." Now, for all this a mistress has herself to blame, and every woman at the head of a household, whether large or small, should make herself thoroughly acquainted with the separate duties of each person in her house. Where the memory is treacherous, a list should be made out of the various points to be mentioned, viz.: wages—board-wages; allowances for beer, tea, sugar, &c.; dress, Sundays out, special duties, fare of servants, washing, visitors, holidays, Sunday dinners, hours of the house, special regulations.

Each lady can add to or take from this list, as she pleases, according to her own needs. The question of wages is, for most housewives, a difficult one. In the present day, wages, like everything, have advanced, and what are now asked for a "plain sober cook" are really exorbitant. I question very much if any more work be done for the high wages now paid than when they were more moderate, and the price now is far in excess of the real value of the article. The custom of giving servants board-wages has rapidly gained ground within the last few years. I myself consider it rather an incentive to dishonesty, as, unless a very strict watch be kept on the contents of the family larder, a great temptation is offered to a servant to pocket her board-wages, and help herself. It is advisable, however, to answer the question of the board-wages allowed while the family are away from home, when you engage a servant, as it saves discussion afterwards; and also to arrange the travelling expenses, if any must be allowed.

Many people at present object to give beer-money, or beer, and prefer to pay higher wages in lieu of it. I think it will be found a more satisfactory plan to dismiss the servants' beer-cask, as, unless you have very honest servants, it is liable to abuse. I believe the custom of allowing beer to servants in England has led to much drunkenness. Tea and sugar should always be allowed for, and a certain quantity, or sum of money for it, should be given out each week.

In very large houses the custom of perquisites can

hardly be abolished. In fact, it forms a not inconsiderable addition to the incomes of the servants; but a clear understanding should be come to, as to what are legitimate perquisites, and what are not. Where it is possible, however, I should make it a duty to abolish the custom, and give a higher wage on condition that nothing was sold out of the house. Where there are so many hard-working poor, to whom bones, vegetables, and grease would be acceptable, I think we are hardly justified in allowing them as perquisites. The washing is so completely a matter of special arrangement that I need not allude to it further.

The much-discussed question of followers and other visitors should be next settled. As regards the latter, a maid with a large family living near her, and many acquaintances, is a very unsatisfactory acquisition. I find the visitor question a most difficult one. Sunday evening is a favourite time for visiting, and if a young servant has a mother or sister near, it is a kindly action to give leave for them to come to tea occasionally. As regards followers, I invariably inquire, as kindly as possible, if my new maiden has a lover; and if there be really an engagement with a view to ultimate matrimony, I consider it my duty to recognise the fact, and allow such opportunity as may be possible for their seeing each other. This we ought all to do, as undoubtedly our domestic servants should have their chance to settle themselves in life. Many of my servants have married from my house into comfortable homes of their own, and I am anxious to lead them at all times into habits of saving and economy. A friend of mine, a man of very methodical habits, used to encourage his servants to put their earnings into the savings bank, by adding £1 to every £4 saved by them, and it is certainly a rare thing in the present day to find a woman who saves any portion of her wages without some such inducement. The passion for dress is so all-prevailing, from the highest to the lowest, that every penny goes in cheap finery, and no provision is laid by for sickness.

The usual rule for holidays, and for Sundays out, I find upon inquiry to be a monthly holiday, and Sunday evenings alternately with a fellow-servant. The monthly holiday can be arranged without much difficulty, by having a charwoman in for a few hours, and servants are usually anxious to help each other, in order that they may be helped again in their turn. The freedom of a whole afternoon out keeps a servant in good humour, I think; but in the case of a stranger I would inquire what friends she had to go to, as servants very often make undesirable friends, to whom they pay their visits, rather than stay at home and have it said they had no friends to go to. In this case there is a temptation to pilfer from the house, in order to take something to make themselves welcome, if not a risk of their becoming the victims of the worst class, of even designing criminals.

The last few things on my list are all household arrangements, of which a mistress should give rather minute details, in order that the person desiring to enter her service may have as perfect an idea as possible of the habits and peculiarities of the household. If she accept the conditions offered to her, she cannot complain if a strict compliance be enforced.

A lady I knew some years ago, who was an excellent manager and mistress, had a very good method of keeping her servants' wages-book; which, for the benefit of young housekeepers, I shall mention here. She entered after the name of each servant, the date of her coming, in what capacity, by whom recommended, the particulars of the character she had received with her, and the amount of wages she was to receive, and sometimes even the duties to be performed. Then followed the entries of wages paid, for as long as she remained. When she left, a short terse notice closed the page of her life in my friend's service. In this notice were carefully enumerated her good qualities, as well as her faults, why she left, and what she could do best. One notice I remember well. It was "Good for nothing except cleaning lamps; at that she was a perfect genius, and we never had such comfort before. Had a passion for pickles."

The ordinary way of proceeding, after an interview with the candidate for your service, is to inquire from her the whereabouts of her last place, and take the address for the purpose of inquiring into her character. From some mistresses it is extremely difficult to get a truthful character. They do not wish to injure the servant by saying what they know of her, and they are also afraid to do so, for servants have been known to threaten their mistress with prosecution if she gave them a bad character. I believe you are not obliged to give a character, but in the case of a servant with whom I am dissatisfied, I give the character I received with her, if a letter, into her own hands before leaving me, and tell her frankly I have not been suited, so that she had better depend on the character with which she came to me, and not on any I could give her. A friend of mine told me, the other day, that she always made it a rule to inform a girl, on entering her service, that her character depended upon the way she behaved; for "When you leave," my friend said, "I shall speak of you exactly as you are, both as to your faults and your good points." This, I think, is really the most honest way. A servant then knows what she has to expect. I cannot too severely blame those ladies who take servants without characters. This state of things has been brought about, I know, by the false and utterly unreliable characters which have been given with worthless people. But any one so foolish as to receive a stranger unrecommended into her house, has only herself to blame for whatever may happen. I had one experience in my life, some years ago, which was a lesson I have never forgotten, on the subject of characters to servants; and as it may teach some other mistress, as I was taught, I shall tell the story. I had not long

taken into my service a quiet-looking, rather timid young woman, as housemaid; her character from her last mistress was that she was "slow," but "very sweet-tempered, and anxious to please." She had been with me about a month, when one day a lady who had come to pay a morning visit saw her in the passage, as she was entering the house, and in the course of conversation asked me, with a very portentous face, "if I knew whom I had taken into my service?" I said, "Yes," and gave a short account of where I had heard of my new maid, and with whom she had lived. "Ah!" said the lady, "that is all very well, but she left my service two years ago for stealing!" I felt quite horror-struck, but made no answer. I am a very slow thinker naturally, and I wanted time to take in the idea. "A thief"—that quiet, timid creature, with stag-like eyes—no! not for a moment could I believe the story. I would inquire into it, of course, but I could not believe it.

When my visitor had departed, a low tap at the drawing-room door was soon followed by the entrance of poor Jane with tearful face.

"What is it, Jane?" I asked gently.

"Oh, if you please, ma'am, I saw Mrs. Robinson come in, and I know she told you I was a thief. But indeed, indeed it is not true," asseverated poor Jane, with a burst of sobs.

"I did not quite believe Mrs. Robinson's story, Jane," I said kindly. "You know Mrs. L— gave me a good character with you; and I should like to hear your story of your troubles with Mrs. Robinson, as I feel sure there is some mistake."

And so, with many tears, Jane told me she had lived with Mrs. Robinson almost a year, when one day a brooch was missed, and as it could not be found when sought for, Mrs. Robinson had accused her of taking it. In vain she had opened her boxes, and asserted her innocence of the charge; though Mrs. Robinson had found nothing in them, she still declared Jane had stolen the brooch and made away with it out of the house. She dismissed her at once, and Jane went home to her mother's, heart-broken. Fortunately, Mrs. L— had known her mother for many years, and had not required any character with her; and Jane had been with her until she went to America.

"Indeed I never saw it, I never took it, and mother would tell you I never gave it to her," wept poor Jane, and I could not help believing the girl. So I said comfortingly—

"Never mind now, Jane; that will do. I feel sure Mrs. Robinson was mistaken. Go back to your work, and don't cry, nor think of it any more."

"And may I stay with you, ma'am?" said Jane, looking up pitifully into my face.

"Yes, of course," I answered, "and I will trust you as if I had never heard the story."

It may be wondered at that I should have so dismissed so serious a charge; and I felt, when I came to consider the case, rather surprised at myself. But there was a feeling of something about the girl which

I could not put aside. Her distress was so real and so pitiful, her manner so meek and timid, that I could not believe her a thief; and I was right. I heard, some time afterwards, that Mrs. Robinson had found

the brooch in a disused dress, and had cleared Jane's character. Jane lived with me until she married: an affectionate, tender-hearted servant; slow in her ways, undoubtedly, but faithful and willing.

### FOOD FOR COLD WEATHER.



**E**VERY man knows that we live in an exceedingly variable climate, and although for by far the greater part of the year we suffer neither the extreme of heat nor cold, still we have at times our hot July or August days, when the English summer, which is often described as consisting of three hot days and a thunderstorm, vies with almost any heat that can be met with in the whole Continent of Europe.

Fortunately for the present season of the year, we are, as a nation, far better prepared to resist the attacks of cold than heat.

Abundant—though now, alas! not cheap—coal is to be obtained, and feather-beds, thick blankets, carpeted rooms are the universal custom in this country—making a winter in London as far superior to one in Paris, as a summer in the latter city is superior to one in London.

The question, however, before us is, do we as a nation sufficiently vary our food to make it consistent with the weather? Here, again, I must confess that we are more apt to give winter's food in summer time than summer's food in winter. Still there are certain dishes especially adapted for cold weather, and at the present season of the year we may call attention to some of them. First, however, it may not be amiss to consider on what general principles one kind of food is adapted for hot countries, and another for cold. The first principle is to remember that in cold weather we require *fat*. Fat and grease contain a large quantity of carbon, and this carbon taken and absorbed into the system keeps up the animal heat.

There is an old story told that many years ago, when the streets of London were lighted with oil-lamps, before the introduction of gas, Russian sailors in England were in the habit of climbing the lamps and drinking the lamp-oil. It is also asserted that in some of the Arctic expeditions the sailors have boiled down and eaten the tallow candles.

Whether these stories are true or not may be left an open question, but there is no doubt that the food craved for was that best suited to sustain heat. We all know how invaluable a remedy cod-liver oil has proved to many invalids, especially among young children; and how medical men often recommend cod-liver oil to delicate persons, to be taken during the winter, and left off on the return of warm spring weather.

Of all winter dishes, perhaps none is so suitable for cold weather as that rather vulgar dish, pea-soup. Persons who affect to despise pea-soup should remember that it is one of the most variable soups ever made. Poor pea-soup, which really owes almost its whole goodness to the split-peas from which it is made, is indeed poor stuff for epicures, though a very cheap and wholesome form of nourishment for the hungry poor. Good pea-soup is an exceedingly delicious compound, and I will describe how to make it.

First of all, one great advantage of pea-soup is that a greasy stock, scarcely adapted to make any other kind of soup, is really best suited for the purpose. For instance, the water in which a large piece of pickled-pork has been boiled, or even the greasy water in which ham or bacon has been boiled, is admirably adapted for making pea-soup. As a rule, the water used for boiling salt beef is too salt to be used for making soup; however, very often by soaking a piece of salt beef in fresh water for twenty-four hours before boiling it, the liquor left will be found to be not too salt for making pea-soup—the cook, of course, remembering that no further salt is added.

We will suppose, therefore, that some stock, or rather some greasy liquor, has been left, say in quantity about two quarts. I would here suggest that the water in which, say, a piece of fresh silver-side of beef has been boiled, should be used again to boil a good-sized piece of bacon, that may be served up hot with some roast fowls, that which is left forming a cold breakfast dish. First of all, take a quart of split-peas, and put them in a large basin, and let them soak in fresh water for nearly a day, a little piece of soda rather bigger than a pea being put into the water to render it softer. Should any of the peas float on the water, take them off and throw them away. Next, strain off the peas, and put them in the greasy stock mentioned to boil, adding to the two quarts of liquor one good-sized head of celery, four good-sized onions, two carrots, two turnips, and a little parsley. Let all this boil till the whole is thoroughly soft, occasionally skimming the soup, taking off that nasty thick film of fat which will sometimes rise to the surface. When the peas are thoroughly soft, strain the whole through a wire sieve into a large basin; pick out the stalk of