

SOME THOUGHTS ON DOMESTIC TRAINING FOR GIRLS.*



Y SIT down to my proposed task with much of anxious perplexity mingled with the strong interest one feels in the subject. It is one so pregnant with important results, so fraught with feelings of home and all its subtle influences for good or evil on the future, that how to handle it in the truest and best way may well make the

former feeling an almost painful one. I was listening, not long ago, to a sermon from a famous preacher. He had got well into his subject, and was in the full tide of his eloquence, when he became aware that a very large proportion of his congregation consisted of young people. I shall not soon forget the look of intense interest with which—breaking off from the main topic of his text—he addressed a few words to them specially. He said he yielded to an irresistible desire to do this, for he never could look upon a number of young men and women without the thought of their future almost overpowering him. That fair blank page—what would they inscribe thereon? Would they be the cause of happiness or misery to the thousands they in their time would influence? Many eyes glistened, and I feel sure many hearts beat responsively, as he adjoined them in a few touching words to grow up to be their country's blessing—godly, truthful, loving men and women.

Our girls then—the daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers of the coming years—how shall we best train them to be in each or all of these characters the sunshine and the help of home? Surely by helping them to obtain, together with a healthy body, a sound mind, a “temperate will,” a calm judgment, and a sunny temper. For these alone can enable a woman to go truthfully, happily, and helpfully through the daily round of often but small duties, to pass safely and patiently over the numberless *little* trials and difficulties that make up her domestic life. I need have no doubt as to which of these thoughts upon our Girls' Domestic Training should come first. For has not the Highest of all authority told us that there is one only beginning for all wisdom? Can we doubt that it must be in “the fear of the Lord”—the simple reverent recognition of this in the household—not so much by words as by the more effectual teaching of the daily life of the parents—that must prepare the way for all other lessons?

I had the happiness, many years since, of being

an inmate for a short time of a family circle where this principle was so interwoven with the daily life, that I was forcibly reminded of the quaint saying of one of the old divines. All religion, he declared, might be summed up in one short phrase, “Serve God and be cheerful.” The house-mother said—and, I felt, truly—that their short, hearty, united worship of a morning seemed to strengthen, encourage, and cheer them all for the busy day that followed. They were truly a hive of bees, busy from morning to night, yet each made time for that needful relaxation and amusement of body and mind, which were needed to keep both healthful and active. I would say, then, let each head of a household make this a primary rule. Before a short simple service of prayer and praise, let *each* member of the family—who is old enough to read intelligently at all—read in a circle a verse from Holy Scripture. This seems to me better than mere listening to the reading, for all *take part*. If possible let a hymn or psalm be sung with musical accompaniment. The morning service should be a cheerful one. Does not everything rejoice, in “earth and sky and sea,” in renewed light and life?

Then begins the working morning for mother and daughters. I am sure that it is well that girls should know the practical part of *housekeeping*—and in this word I include all that a German matron would understand by it. Theory is all very well, and necessary, but what should we think of a watchmaker, for instance, who had read and studied all the best authorities on mechanism, but had never himself put together the component parts of a clock or watch?

We have had, of late years, many most excellent books on household management, household cookery, household adornment, and so forth. Read them by all means, and make use of some of the admirable advice they contain. But, mothers, let your girls go through their apprenticeship in house matters. If there is more than one, let each in her turn take every week her part in certain divisions of homework, ay, and help with her own hands and thoughts in it. Thus, while one sister looks after the making of beds, the dusting and arrangement of bed-rooms, let another in like manner attend to reception and general rooms, while a third takes upon herself the ordering and preparation and, if need be, assists in the cooking of the principal meal. If mistresses knew practically how all household work should be done, they would not only have better servants, but would also be better served. For no class is more shrewd, as a rule, than that of domestic servants. They respect thoroughly a mistress who *knows*, and for that reason will have her work well done, and also will understand what amount of strength and energy of mind and body is required to do it. Such a mistress will not only be firm in requiring duty to be done, but will also be reasonable and thoughtful

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in her requirements, and patient and forbearing when ignorance or weakness is the cause of failure or neglect. I need not say how the mother should enforce upon her girls—as each takes her turn in the daily routine—the great principle of *thoroughness*. If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well. Let the most perfect cleanliness, neatness, and order be the lesson of each day. If the good and healthful practice of early rising prevail, few indeed will be the occasions that can excuse even hurry, much less slipshod performance. The younger girls may each learn to take a pleasure in helping before their studies begin. In the happy family I have before alluded to, a merry little maiden of six trotted off each morning to fulfil some small, understood duty, and thus early learned that most needful of all lessons, to think of others first.

We have had a great movement lately in a very important branch of household management. I allude to the cookery lessons which became so general, and I may add so fashionable. All honour to the promoters of this needful instruction, for who shall tell the amount of discomfort, nay, of positive wretchedness that bad cookery entails upon a household? All suffer from it, from the poor hard-working man of business who can ill afford to have his digestive organs trifled with, to the children, rendered cross and miserable from the same cause.

But are we not in danger of forgetting a very useful rule—that it is *not* the most expensive or the most elaborate dishes that are the most successful? I think, from what I have observed in many of the “demonstration lessons,” that there is a tendency to spend too much both of time and money in the preparation of food. Make cookery a science if you will, but do not give it undue prominence, nor sacrifice too much to its pursuit. And in connection with this subject occurs the inestimable value of training girls in habits of thrift. A clever, kindly, and very practical woman—Miss Emily Faithfull—has spoken honest, fearless words on this virtue, and shown how, in all its branches, it is sadly wanting in all classes in the present. It is an old saying that the Creator of the world wastes nothing. But how much do His creatures waste? If I were to tell how many families in the lower ranks (to quote from my own experience as a district visitor) I have seen inadequately fed or half clothed, when the materials in both cases might by a little more carefulness and trouble have been quite sufficient, I should scarcely know where to end. To go a little

higher—do we not all know of houses, every room of which testifies to the want of thrift; of dinners ill-managed, costing twice the sum of a more frugal and far more comfortable meal; of children in expensive yet ill-fitting and unsuitable clothing—all from the absence of this needful virtue? I remember, in my early days, a lady (in every sense of the word) who contrived, on a very limited income, to have her house and its inmates and belongings always pleasant to the eye, comfortable, and healthy. On being once asked by an intimate friend how she did it, her answer was, “My dear, I have to be thrifty.” Many a tempting and nourishing dinner have I partaken of, in her always hospitable house, mainly consisting of what less thrifty and clever housewives would have thought useless. Her bag of household odds and ends—cuttings-out, bits of braid, &c. &c. (often relegated to the rags)—saved both time and money, in preventing a journey to the draper’s shop when only a trifle was wanted. These may seem little things, but they were instances in detail of the spirit of thrift which her household was taught to practise.

I spoke, at the outset of my remarks, of the training which aims at healthiness of body with soundness of mind. I need not say *how* necessary to these is relaxation and innocent amusement, in as much outdoor exercise as possible. Every good mother will see that her girls have these, and will herself direct, and sympathise with, their enjoyment.

I have had in my mind—as is self-evident—more especially the domestic training of girls of the middle class. I concluded that such were principally meant, for does not the middle class to a very great extent influence both the higher and lower? Let us have good wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters there, in the next generation, as I am thankful to say we have so many now, and I will answer for it the heaven will work throughout. What is the “conclusion of the whole matter” then? Let piety begin at home in loving service to God, and those among whom He sets the earthly life. Happy the household where “love shall still be lord of all”—the true unselfish love which recognises in all the God-given tie of human fellowship, which covers with its beautiful mantle the mistakes and shortcomings of the weak, and bears with strong heart and thoughtful mind the burdens of others. A girl breathing this moral atmosphere must grow up into a gentle, loving, yet wise and helpful woman.

