

trouble; a worn-visaged woman sits on one of the benches; then another labourer lurches down; far out in mid-stream a little screw-tug hauls fast along a train of bulky barges. The water is lumpy to-day; but presently, up glide two boats, one from either side, swiftly and smoothly; officials start from their shelters, gangways are rattled on to the sponsons, impulsive would-be passengers are prevented from hurrying on

board before those coming off have disembarked, a clergyman and his boys turn up from somewhere, the late passenger thunders down the incline, the impulsive labourers, disdainful of the gangways, jump on the sponsons by the paddle-boxes, and before you can say the familiar Jack Robinson, the pretty little vessels, as docile to the captains' will as the best trained horse, are away to the next pier.

SCHOOLS OF DOMESTIC SERVICE.



DON'T approve of factory girls at all," pronounced a wealthy lady with whom I had ventured to plead the claims of a working girls' club. "Why do girls go into factories instead of entering domestic service, where they would have regular wages, good food, and comfortable homes, and would not be exposed to

the temptations you describe? There should be no such thing as factory girls; I don't approve of them at all!" she reiterated.

I did not remind the irate lady that she owed to the work of these same factory girls a large proportion of the necessities and luxuries of life by which she was surrounded; nor did I endeavour to prove to her that great as is our need of domestic servants, we should find it difficult to employ in our homes a sudden influx of the hundreds of thousands of maidens who are working in our factories to-day. I felt strongly inclined to impress upon her that she would about as readily admit a gorilla into her elegant house as one of the rough lassies I was trying to benefit. But I refrained, and contented myself with laying before her one or two of the reasons and remedies, as I deemed them, of the increasing distaste which the girls of the working-class seem to manifest towards domestic service.

I said little of the disqualification on the *mistress* side of the problem, though I might have dilated on the slavery, the unkindness, the loneliness endured by servants, especially in lower middle-class families. It was useless to touch on these things: one cannot venture to suggest a direct panacea for them; they are conditions out of which we hope to grow with the development of the race. But I spoke of the hindrances to the girls themselves, which seemed to open vistas of surprise to my hearer; and thinking there may be others to whom my experiences may likewise be new, I am setting them down here.

As is well known, the children leave our Board schools at the age of twelve or thirteen years (sometimes even earlier). Girls cannot enter factories till

they are fourteen, so that there is a danger that at a most important period in a child's career there may be a period of interregnum, or waste of a year, two, or even three years. Amongst the lower working-classes in London and the large towns it is usual for the wives as well as the husbands to go out to their daily toil, and when the parents are industrious or the need is pressing, work will at once be found for the little lass whose emancipation from the Board school has been anticipated as a new means of supply to the wages fund; the work she will do will be one of the innumerable home industries by the aid of which the poor manage to eke out a subsistence: tailoring, match-box making, boot-stitching, or whale-bone covering, perhaps. Or maybe a "place" will be found for her, and she will have her first taste of domestic service. Too often, however, she will be left at home: ostensibly to mind a baby very likely, really to run wild on the streets. There will be no one to initiate her into the decent housewifely ways which might make a true *home* of the bare tenement, and be a source of untold comfort to the toiling members of the family. She will be loitering and romping with rough companions, forgetting all she has learned at school, the very discipline of school proving a stimulus to evil by the rebound of license consequent upon the withdrawal of its restraint. All this just at a time when the child's education should commence. As has been said, during school-time she has been only "carting materials," and now, instead of beginning to build, she squanders what she has gathered. By the time she is fourteen she is confirmed in her wild ways, and only fit for work at a factory; no decent home would be open to her, neither would she submit to its discipline.

I have said that the little lass sometimes takes a "place" at twelve or thirteen years of age. It may be easily imagined what sort of "place" this would be. No one with a very comfortable home or easy ideas of housekeeping would hire a *child* to do the work, so that the places most frequently open to such children in the poor districts are the small general shops, beer-shops, and the homes of women-sweaters. The women in these establishments want a little drudge to help in the shop, run errands, mind the baby, do the washing,

and "tidy up." Very often they are little less than tyrants at home. They have hard lives; drunken husbands, perhaps; they are beaten and baffled in their struggle with the world, and their little advancement they have won at the cost of a tenacious resistance; the only power they can wield is that over their children and the little alien who comes for a paltry eightpence or two shillings a week. Without teaching or experience, with little brain power and no physique, the child servant is expected to do the work of a woman. Doubtless she is often very stupid, and her mistress, to whose own share no discipline has come but that of hard words and blows, knows no other method of instructing her poor apprentice. In such a home as this there is no thrift; times vary, food is sometimes scant, and then, of course, it is the little hireling who goes short; the mother has *some* feeling for her own offspring. The paltry wages fall into arrear, if, as I have known, they are not *kept back*, so that a good girl shall be unable to leave for fear of forfeiting what is due to her. Of a truth, things are not always as bad as this, but I have known such cases, where the child-servant has toiled on under these conditions, leaving for her work at six in the morning, not returning till nine at night, her wages weeks in arrear. For her there is no Factory Act, there are no Factory Inspectors, the Labour Commission takes no cognisance of her case. Is it any wonder that she rushes to the factory the day she is fourteen, disgusted with domestic service, and resists one's pleadings to take another place with: "You see, miss, I must have my evenin's and Sundays," though the evenings may not begin till eight o'clock, and Sundays must be spent in cleaning up at home?

As conditions at present exist, and there is so much poverty, thriftlessness, and shiftlessness amongst the lower classes, what can be suggested as a remedy? Firstly, the little girls at school should be taught something of the American Kitchen Garden system. We are careful in our better-class homes to foster the housewifely sense in our little maidens from the beginning. They have their dolls to nurse and dress, their dolls' houses to tidy and clean, their dolls' dinner and tea-things to wash up, their toy cooking-stoves to play with. But more often than not the children of the poor have none of these things. It was a revelation to me when I saw for the first time a doll given to a child who had never had one before. I shall never forget the clutch with which she seized it, and the hug of speechless rapture with which she folded it in her arms. It is difficult to insert anything into the already crowded curriculum of our Board schools, but if ladies would experiment by taking classes for an hour on a Saturday or in an evening, to teach the children, with the aid of large toys and bright songs,

sweeping, dusting, ironing, washing a baby, the directors of our national education might be readily won by the success of the scheme, as they have been by that of the Children's Happy Evenings.

But though little girls might learn much in this way, more is required, and we need free Schools of Domestic Science, to which the girls should be passed, on finishing their standards in the elementary schools. We fully appreciate the good work which some of the School boards are achieving in their cookery schools, but housemaids' work and laundry work should be included. The pupils should attend such schools every day; and if attendance were not compulsory, it would probably at first have to be encouraged by means of certificates and rewards. After six months the most proficient girls might be hired out to work in the neighbourhood by the day or half-day, only a small (if any) percentage of their earnings being retained by the school. Subsequently, for those who choose to go on further, classes for dressmaking, hair-dressing, French, waiting at table, home-nursing, and the duties of upper servants might be added, and the funds of the school be materially increased by the fees of ladies using it as a registry-office for trained servants.

I have laid stress on the condition that the attendance of children should be *daily* because I have found that one of the many terrors that besets even a big girl in going away to service is that of sleeping in a room or a *bed* by herself. In our large towns the poor live so much huddled together, four or five in a room, that the thought of the cold, loneliness, darkness, of going to bed alone, has been more than some of them could face. After a while, it would be best for the girl to enter the School of Domestic Science altogether, to accustom her to absence from home, but at first a good deal of liberty should be given her, and its withdrawal be a matter of degrees.

Moral lessons should certainly not be neglected, but the training and discipline would go far to supply what has often been entirely lacking in the servants we take almost recklessly into our homes.

The expense of such an undertaking may be considered insuperable, but it need not be very great at first. If it were necessarily enormous, when we consider the amount of comfort or annoyance which servants are capable of bringing us, and the dangers which beset our young girls in factories, we should be prepared to make a sacrifice. It is possible that our Colleges of Domestic Science might prove so attractive that young mistresses might be induced to take courses of instruction also, which would not only increase the funds of the undertaking, but serve the cause of domestic service by enlarging the knowledge, sympathy, and consideration of the mistress.

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