

“BOTH SIDES OF THE SHIELD.”

ARE LADY-HELPS A SUCCESS? YES.

BY EDITH E. CUTHELL, AUTHOR OF “LADY LORRIMER’S SCHEME,” “ONLY A GUARD-ROOM DOG,” ETC. ETC.



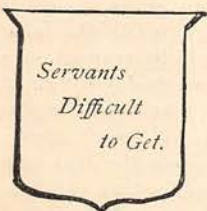
DURING the last forty years woman's sphere has widened in two directions—the intellectual and the practical. The higher education of girls has made enormous strides, and their capacity for mental work has proportionately increased.

On the other hand, their practical and manual and physical training has been also greatly extended. For the word “genteel” we have substituted “womanly.” Cooking, nursing, gardening, dairy-work, dress-making, and millinery have been thrown open to the gently-born and refined woman, for whom formerly governessing was the only available means of livelihood.

Hundreds of girls who used to be relegated to vacuous idleness over worsted work and wax flowers, or forced into uncongenial and unsuitable teaching, can now be usefully and profitably employed in positions formerly considered menial. The lady-help is a distinctly *fin de siècle* product. Our grandmothers, though they made their own jams and got up their own fine laces, would have scorned the idea of doing such things for hire. Yet the teaching other folks' children has never been held degrading. But in our fuller, busier lives, with our present crowd of surplus women, the lady-help, like mercy, comes as a boon and a blessing, both to herself and to others. Now that education is so universal we demand heads as well as hands.

The lady-help combines both. Where one sister gravitates towards nursing and enters a hospital, and another takes up teaching in a high school, the third, less robust and strong-nerved, less intellectual, more home-loving and domestic, with a love of children and a taste for housekeeping, and deft with her fingers, can become truly a lady's help.

The movement, like all innovations, was laughed at at the first, like Sir Robert Peel's “Bobbies,” or the Volunteers, in the sixties. Let us attempt to dispel any lingering doubts as to the success of the lady-help, and first from her employer's point of view.



We have only to glance at the advertisement columns of the daily papers to see how increasingly difficult good servants are to procure. The well-trained superior article naturally gravitates towards the larger houses, and middle-class families have to put up with the smashing, banging, stumping, smudgy, raw material.

The mistress of a country vicarage, the wife of the small professional man, or of the upper tradesman in

a provincial town, who have a certain amount of outside or social duties, and who cannot be always in their nurseries and kitchens, to such the lady-help is a real boon.

Everyone knows in a small house how the servant's powers of song or of altercation, their moods of mirth or temper become, after a time, too omnipresent and apparent. Supplant her by a lady-help and there is peace in the kitchen.

Some people have a prejudice about asking their equals to perform menial offices for them. They do not prefer a lady-nurse in sickness, for instance. But surely a vulgar, rough and uneducated person about the house is not preferable to a refined one? The mistress who lays herself out to treat her lady-help kindly and unselfishly will find herself amply repaid for such extra outlay of consideration, by receiving in return more loyalty, more head and heart service than from one not of her own class, for class feeling can never be wholly broken down, and servants are a class, if not, indeed, a caste.

The lady-help, to be a success, should not be a mere machine, neither should she be treated as a household drudge. Her comfort, both in kitchen and in her bedroom, should be considered. These, even if stuffy, cramped, or bare, may seem luxurious and palatial to a servant from a two-roomed cottage, but the lady-help will expect more refined surroundings. In these days, however, so much stress is laid on artistic houses, and comfort so much thought of, that it hardly seems necessary to insist on this point.




In the matter of economy the lady-help is distinctly worth her salt. She has no lurking affinity for the baker's boy, and does not waste her time over the area railings with the passing policeman. She is superior to perquisites, and can be trusted to check and pay the books, having the pen of the ready reckoner, as well as of the ready writer. Thus she saves her mistress both time and money.

We have heard a great deal lately about lady journalists. There is a daily increasing class of married women, mothers of families, too, who supplement their husbands' incomes by professional work of their own, either in teaching in schools or privately, by newspaper or art work, or as superintendents or manageresses.

To such as these the lady-help is specially valuable, in conjunction with regular servants. Hitherto we have only considered the lady-help alone, with no other servants, in poorer households, helping the mistress, the mistress helping her, and

living quite as one of the family. In the household of the professional woman the lady-help is a success under another aspect. She is more than a mere upper servant. Besides managing the children or the kitchen she can assist in social duties, do the shopping, write the notes, interview callers and business people, and in countless ways save the time which is the money of her busy mistress.

It follows that she must have a servant or servants under her, but she herself will be more than a mere housekeeper and less groovey than a governess or mere teaching machine. The mother need not fear, then, that during her enforced absences her children are left entirely with inferiors. The lady-help is a refined companion for her girls, as well as a buffer between her mistress and servants, tradesmen, and bores.



*Sharing a
Crust v.
Picking
Crumbs.*

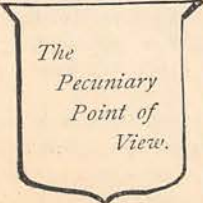
And now a word as to the lady-help herself. Granted that it is always bitter to eat the bread of others, is it not easier to share their crust with them than to pick up the crumbs which fall from their table? Doubtless the lady-help, to be successful, must be gifted with

tact and temper. The governess lives apart in her own domain; the hospital lady-nurse has her being under a *régime* of discipline which it is easy to bear conjointly with a crowd of others. The position of the lady-help, however peculiar, need not, therefore, be anomalous.

If she is thrown with servants who are not subject to her, she must expect jealousy and other disagreeables. But if these are met with dignity, tact, and kindness—if there is no suspicion of siding against the servants with the mistress, who can tell what her influence for good on her associates may not be? A few generations of lady-helps may leaven and raise the whole system of domestic service throughout the land.

Doubtless, however, the lady-help is happier and more successful in small households where no servants are kept, though the work may be rougher and more continuous. But a nice girl will soon adapt herself to the family where she is well treated. It is the same with pleasant governesses. The lady-help, however, must not undertake her work with a view to romance.

It is only in novels that she marries the eldest son or the rich bachelor lodger. The days of Cinderellas are past. As regards society, however, and intercourse with people of her own class, the lady-help in a small household is infinitely better off than the governess in a family of superior position.



*The
Pecuniary
Point of
View.*

From a pecuniary point of view, again, there is no denying that the sphere of lady-help offers the best remuneration for the least preliminary outlay. The qualifications are more those of character and temperament than those of expensive training or natural gifts. Contrast the

salaries commanded respectively by nursery governesses and by cooks. Domestic service is better paid than teaching.

The careful mother, obliged to send her daughter out into the world, can have no doubt as to the success of the lady-help movement. There are many girls with a natural love of children and a wealth of motherly tenderness which, unfortunately, will probably never be expended upon offspring of their own. Why not turn these gifts—for surely such a feeling, springing from the heart, is a gift, and from the God who is love Himself—why not turn these gifts to account? An ear for music, an eye for drawing, has its monetary value. Why in the same way should not a love of babies, or the possession of what are called "cook's fingers"?

Again, is it not safer for a girl to be living "at home," as it were, under one roof, than to be tramping to and fro as a daily governess, or to be turned loose among an unknown herd of close companions in a shop or a type-writing office? These considerations ought to weigh with mothers.


In conclusion I have in my mind's eye an ideal lady-help, modelled on a real person. She was a girl of good social position, not at all bookish, but a fine horsewoman and good tennis player, who, wearied of the eternal round of the London season, went out to pay a year's visit to relations ranching in the Far West, facetiously dubbing herself the "hired girl." There were no servants, of course, on the ranche, and I inquired wonderingly of her mother one day how the life suited Kathleen.

"She is enjoying herself immensely," was the reply, "though, of course, it is hard work. She failed in churning, she writes—her butter wouldn't 'come,' but she has undertaken the washing, and is most successful in getting up white shirts: 'a dandy at clear starching,' they call her."

"White shirts!" I gasped. "Do they wear white shirts out there?"

"Indeed they do," replied my informant. "They dress for dinner every evening when the day's work is over, and I have just sent Kathleen out another tea-gown."

This is an ideal picture of a lady-help, I know. But it is far from being an impossible one, and it is a good thing to have an ideal to aspire to, and if the lady-help and her employer try to fall into some such lines, in the future the ideal will be realised. In the meantime it is good, in this workaday world, to have a good, common-sense moral maxim to cling to and live up to, for ideals are, after all, far-off, cloudy things, and no better motto can guide the lady-help than the old-fashioned one we imbibed as children, namely, "to do our duty in that state of life (whatever it is) to which it shall please God to call us."



*The
Ideal
Lady-help.*

LADY-HELPS ARE NOT A SUCCESS.

*A Theory
for
Housekeepers.*

SOME years ago a theory was propounded to housekeepers, which at once arrested their attention, for it promised to solve once and for all those vexed questions for ever arising between mistress and maid, servers and served. The middle-class matron felt that

henceforth she would no more be distracted by careless, untidy, wasteful, ill-tempered domestics, but that her cares would be shared by two or three delightful young ladies, who would get through the work of the house in half the time and with twice the “gumption” of the erewhile Mary Jane. The cooking would be done on the most hygienic principles, whereby digestion would be ensured, delicate appetites tempted, and the totals in the grocers’ and butchers’ weekly books halved. Instead of echoes of the type of “Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay” and “Mrs. ’Enevry ’Awkins” floating up the kitchen stairs from untutored throats, gentle strains from tuneful “Mascagni” or original “Grieg” would be wafted to the drawing-room; while in the evening, work done, and the house in order from cellar to garret, two pretty, well-dressed damsels would come into the drawing-room, and play accompaniments for Belinda’s violin, read to the blind aunt, or play backgammon with grandpapa. No more underpaid, overworked governesses would be seen. Every girl who, through stress of circumstance or lack of brain, could not take a degree at college, or display a diploma, would be drafted into the ranks of the lady-helps, and become an angel to some untidy house. The advertiser who required “A lady who can teach German and French (acquired abroad), the rudiments of Latin, music, drawing, and the usual branches of a good English education to four young ladies. Salary, £16,” would have to replace it by a request for “A thoroughly domestic young lady who can superintend the kitchen department of a household of eight. Nothing menial required. Salary, £20.” Mater’s girls would all go to high schools, and she would have daily leisure for needlework, reading, walking, or correspondence, as her taste might incline.

*Some
Flaws
in It.*

A delightful theory; but even at starting there were flaws in it. The “surplus governess” could not at once undertake the duties of cook, parlourmaid, or housemaid, these professions requiring as much training (though of a different kind) as that of teacher; and the numerous girls who caught at the chance of quitting the school-room for the kitchen did not pause to consider that to send up two dinners a day for a family of eight, to economise provisions and fuel, to keep the store cupboard well stocked and the table well covered, required

forethought, practice, and instruction; and their failures cast a shadow of incapacity over the lady *cook* from the first. Then the difficulty of arranging about the hard work—the actual scrubbing of a greasy kitchen floor, the attention to sinks and grease traps, blackleading the kitchener and cleaning out its flues—has always proved a stumbling block in the path of the lady-help. It seemed out of place to require Dorothy or Phyllis, with her dainty appearance and soft hands, to undertake these uncongenial tasks of the Mary Jane or Jemima whom she replaced; but if she could not be asked to do it, who could? If a girl to do this hard work had to be brought in, the difficulty about below-stairs etiquette and companionship again arose. The original theory that *all* the work of the house should be done by ladies, who would be together in the kitchen during work time and ascend to the drawing-room when it was over, became an unworkable one, if a grimy Matilda were introduced to the household. In the same way, the young lady who undertook to be housemaid in a household with three servants would object to scrubbing the nursery floor, cleaning the nurse’s bedroom, emptying baths, scouring lavatories, and carrying up coals. If, therefore, the lady-help in the kitchen would only weigh, measure, mix, and make nice dishes and arrange a good menu, and the lady house-parlourmaid only clean silver, trim lamps, lay the table, wait at it, and dust the room after making the beds, another inmate must be taken into the house, and other difficulties and troubles begin.

*More
Difficulties.*

But even where the lady-helps did their work fairly well, and the trouble about the rough scrubbing was arranged, other worries were not infrequent. Sometimes she who claimed to be, and to be treated as, a lady, was in many cases the uneducated daughter of a tradesman or a small farmer, who believed she would at once better her position and have less to do as “help” in some other house than her overcrowded home, and was by birth, training, and disposition, quite unfit to associate with the family of the mistress who received her. Or, again, she was a lady in all essentials, but failed to grasp the tone of conduct required in her very difficult position, and mater found that although she no longer was annoyed by the cook who played the accordion, yet she was only exchanged for the girl who scraped the violin; and Matilda Jane’s Sunday frock, with its aggressive trimming, was replaced by Miss Julia’s tailor-made costume, which was easily recognised as a replica of the latest purchase of the eldest daughter of the house. Cook no longer asked one evening a week for—chapel; but Miss Dorothy required almost as frequently to go and dine with the aunt who was passing through town, or to celebrate the twenty-first birthday of the cousin who was going

to India; while the friends who came to see her had to be entertained at tea in the drawing-room, and probably turned out to be acquaintances of mater's own friends, through whom filtered back to her the intelligence that "dear Dorothy had a bad time of it, poor Mrs. Smith was so very exacting."

Then would arise another case. When the help was ready and willing to do all the work, hard or otherwise, required of her, if she were really a lady, refined, educated up to a certain point, well-bred and well-nurtured, gifted with a head, a heart, and a conscience, she did all that was expected of her, and did it faithfully and well; but at the end of six months she broke down *hopelessly*, and the employer who had been rejoicing over the treasure she possessed, mourned the loss of help and the help's loss of health.

The
Lady-help
a Failure.

These and other causes we have not space to mention have made the lady-help a failure; that she is so is abundantly testified by a look through the advertising columns of the daily or weekly papers, which for a year or two teemed with lists of lady-helps.

Now the name is either absent altogether or else is replaced by the "Useful Companion," the "Lady Housekeeper," or the "Young Lady of twenty, to take the place of elder daughter."

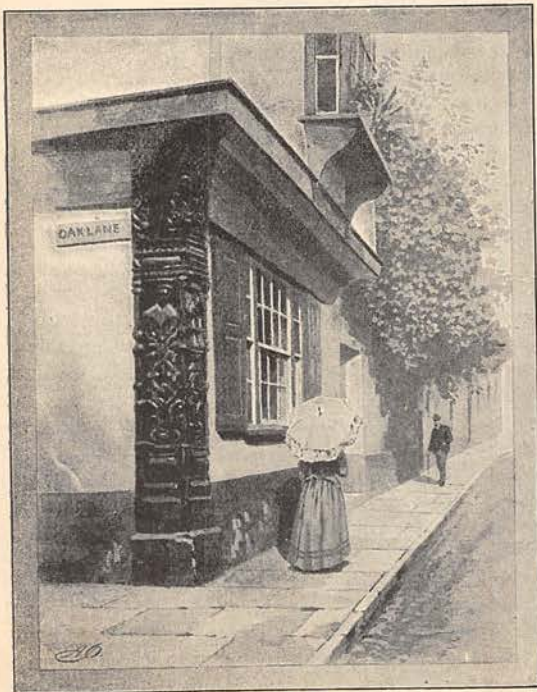
"Mothers' helps" are still to be engaged, and they are always supposed to be children's nurses. This we imagine to be the best field of operation for the real lady-help; for, surely, to have a refined gentlewoman to take entire charge of her children must be a great boon to a busy matron.

The vexed question of mistress and maid, therefore, does not seem to be nearer settlement; for though as mother's help, or as general helper where two or three spinsters live together in a flat, the lady-help may prove useful, as an actual worker, to take her place amongst the army of servants, she has not been found eligible.

It seems, however, that there must be a large field for the operations of those girls who cannot, for various reasons, become governesses, and who are not fit for genuine service. They have largely recruited the ranks of the sick nurses, they are to be found in dozens at the call of every surgeon, and they ably fill places of trust as housekeepers, superintendents of the laundries in large establishments, school matrons, lecturers on cookery, hygiene, nursing, and dressmaking for County Councils, and as amanuenses, secretaries, guides, couriers, companions, and even gardeners. In all these (and many more) positions is scope enough for the helper; but it is better that she should drop the prefix, and evince her title to be a gentlewoman by the conduct which proves her to be one.

PICTURESQUE IPSWICH.

"Hence to Ipswich, doubtless one of the sweetest, most pleasant, well-built townes in England." 8th July, 1656.—"THE DIARY OF JOHN EVELYN."



A CORNER POST.

IPSWICH, in spite of its great age and its respectable population, is still very much in the country. At least, so it seemed to Anna and me as we walked about the town one warm summer's evening.

In Ipswich you are never far from the sight of green trees; and ten minutes' walk in any direction will show you some glimpse of Nature—be it river-bank, wooded hill, or distant corn-fields.

The sixteen churches of Ipswich help to deepen this semi-rural impression. Most of them are surrounded by spacious churchyards, where avenues of limes, rows of sycamores, or groups of elms lift up their green heads with that happy, vigorous growth which trees seldom display, unless they are nourished on country air.

The number and positions of these churches alone would tell us that Ipswich was an ancient place; while its tramways, its factories, its newspaper office, its girls' high school, and its girls' club assure us that it is a very modern one.

It is this union of past and present which gives its peculiar interest to Ipswich. It makes the town, in a high degree, historical.

Though it is not connected with any one great event in our history, Ipswich is a sort of historical event in itself.