

THE MODERN SERVANT GIRL.

WE hear a great deal now about "service not being what it was," and I cannot help thinking that there is some truth in the statement. Without committing myself to "Reactionary" or "Retrograde" views in general—without laying all the blame on the School Board—I am disposed, for reasons which I will proceed to explain, to echo the popular cry.

It is against young girls as servants—the products, presumably, of "improved education"—that I bring

my charge. I do not want to complain of servants in general, for I have received from them in my life more kindness than I can ever repay; it is against the raw, untried, unapprenticed article that I inveigh. For five years I have suffered from a succession of these. They have been of all kinds: quick, slow, active, lazy, pleasant, sulky; but one and all incompetent to do the work they professed to do. When I have exhausted the resources of London, I have tried the country—for the unknown is always desirable. The results have been equally disappointing. While disclaiming any tendency to Mrs. Carlyle's spirit of romancing, and with no such awful revelations as hers to disclose with regard to either girls—or insects—I think I may safely say that, with rare exceptions, the young servant girl, under present conditions, is, to use a colloquial but expressive phrase, "more trouble than she is worth."

I began with a little damsel of sixteen, named Martha, who came to me from a large well-managed orphanage in the East End. In many ways she was vastly superior to her successors, being willing and obedient; but she was absolutely devoid of method. This, I will allow, was not altogether her own fault, for she had been "driven" like a machine all through her short life. One day had succeeded another at the orphanage with monotonous regularity, and the girls had been taught everything except to teach themselves. Martha, probably as a result of this training, was easily depressed; she took a saddened view of life, and everything made her weep. She could supply no originality, or even "gumption."

"What shall we have for dinner?" I once asked her vaguely, and waited for a suggestion.

Martha's eyes grew round as she revolved in her mind the dinners of the preceding days.

"Ye've 'ad chops, and ye've 'ad steaks," she said, after a prolonged pause; "and I don't see what else ye *can*'ave."

Martha's kitchen was a sight to behold, and she never had a clean face; but she was sympathetic—almost too sympathetic. If I inadvertently complained of a headache in her hearing, I was always reminded of it for a week afterwards.

"Got the 'edache agin, m'm?" she would say as her morning greeting. "It *is* miserable, ain't it, to feel like that?"

Poor little Martha! I never enjoyed good health until she took her departure.

My next experience was with a young person named Marianne—a girl of eighteen, with curly brown hair, a round rosy face, and a perpetual smile. I flattered myself that I should spend several pleasant years with Marianne. Alas! I reckoned without my host. Like "Jane," in that well-known little work called "Reading without Tears," Marianne was "a nice girl, but she stole and told lies." She stole as unblushingly as Topsy, and told lies with at least equal ingenuity. She had also other affinities with Topsy, for one could not overcome a certain liking for her, notwithstanding her faults. She was *so* good-tempered, and directly after a severe reprimand would come up again smiling so sweetly. "The more you



"A NICE GIRL, BUT SHE STOLE AND TOLD LIES."



"CHEAP 'DREADFULS.'"



"MY 'ED'S ALL OF A GOGGLE, AND MY LEGS ARE ALL OF A FUR."

squeezed the bolster on her" (and it needed a deal of squeezing!) "the more she looked round the corner of it." Reproofs rolled off her like water off a duck, and she was always pleasant and amiable. She was very fond, too, of reading—a pursuit which I encouraged until I found it hopeless to elevate her taste. Many servants, I have noticed—and many mothers too, for that matter—appear to think that "reading" is a virtue in itself, entirely independent of the thing read; and Marianne was addicted exclusively to Dream Books and cheap "Dreadfuls." Her character cannot be better shown than by the fact that her first month's wages went in buying a showy gilt Albert watch chain, which, as she possessed no watch, and her only pair of stockings showed large holes, seemed rather superfluous. Even Miss Ophelia herself would have given Marianne up, and yet to this day I occasionally regret her.

My next attempt was of a very different kind. Susan was as fragile as Marianne had been big and strong. She was seventeen; neat, and precise; and she gave herself all the airs of a little old woman. Poor girl! she was not particularly robust, but no confirmed out-patient of an hospital could have described her complaints more fondly than she did.

"My 'ed's all of a goggle, and my legs are all of a fur," she would say; adding, with a weak little smile, "I think it's carryin' the coals as does it."

Poor Susan was already an expert "class leader," and her school prizes, which she proudly showed me, were many and various. I couldn't help thinking that almost any walk in life would have suited this young woman better than that of a general servant. Her mother came to see me one day, to ask me if I

couldn't manage to make the work easier—"Must she carry the coals?" for instance.

"Well, you see," I said, "I engaged her to carry coals, and she wouldn't be of much use to me, if I did all the work while she sat in the parlour."

Susan left at the end of two months.

"I feel better in meself, m'm," she said at parting, with the manner of a dame of sixty, "but my meals they lay *there*" (pointing to her chest); "and as for the meat, I can turn it round and round in my mouth, but swaller it I can't."

After Susan's departure I tried a registry office. Now, to my mind, registry offices are nets for the unwary. How often have we not entered their voracious maw, and paid ten, or even fifteen, shillings without getting any return! And the cheap registry offices are just as bad as the dear ones. After trying a few "high-class" offices with no result, I thought I would try another kind, and applied for a servant at a dingy little place near Tottenham Court Road, where the usual charge was a shilling only. A crowd of girls and women filled the small shop—and it was certainly not a pleasant-looking crowd. Girls with bold eyes and long straight fringes, and feathers of the Whitechapel type; women, on whose bloated faces drink was but too plainly written—a brazen, pitiful group! I paid the shilling, gave my address, and one of the nicest-looking of the waiting damsels was brought forward for interrogation. She was a pert, red-cheeked girl of twenty, with a dirty face, a frayed ulster, and a wild red fringe that obscured her eyes. I stated my requirements. The girl did not budge.



"SHE WAS A PERT, RED-CHEEKED GIRL . . . WITH A WILD RED FRINGE."

"Business 'ouse?" she inquired, without moving an eyelid.

"What's that?" I asked.

The woman in charge explained that it meant a shop.

The girl was dismissed—or, rather, dismissed me—with contempt; for mine is not a "business 'ouse." With two others I fared no better. They made the same query, and departed; and I departed too, leaving my shilling behind me. The shopwoman promised to send me a suitable damsel, but I need hardly say that no one came.

I may state in this connection that the real slum-girl is, like her better-educated sister, very contemptuous of service. I remember once sending a raw girl of fifteen from a starving family to a registry office, enclosing the necessary fee for her in an envelope. Subsequently we found that her mother had appropriated the fee, and drunk—so to speak—the clothes. Finally the girl refused a place I eventually got for her, because she had expected at least ten pounds a year, and was only promised nine pounds. She preferred a daily trudge to and from the factory at two shillings per week.

But to return to my own girls. After the failure of the registry offices to supply my wants, I advertised for "a strong country girl."

The numbers who answered my advertisement seemed certainly encouraging, and I congratulated myself—a little too hastily, as it afterwards turned out. All the applicants represented themselves as giants of strength, paragons of virtue, and of unflinching industry. I engaged the most promising, who, among her other virtues, boasted that she had never had a day's ill-health. At the end of three days I found her weeping in the pantry.

"What's the matter, Ellen?" I said.

"Oh, m'm, please, my legs is all of a tremble, and I think my 'ealth is bound to suffer if I stay. The fogs, they make me feel fainty-like."

"But I thought you said you were so strong."

"Well, m'm, I've 'eard say as 'ow the strongest goes off soonest."

I administered some sal volatile, and did the little work there was to do myself, sending the patient to bed. Next day I sent her out for an hour's run in the fresh air. She went out at 10 a.m., and did not return for twelve hours. At ten at night the invalid walked in smiling. She did not stay long after this. From experience of Ellen and the three girls that followed her, I have come to the conclusion that many girls come up from the country just for a week or two's jaunt in London, and get the fares for the proposed jaunt from the ladies who are foolish enough to engage them. Ellen and her successors seemed surprised that any work at all was expected of them. One of them proposed to leave after a week, saying plaintively—

"I couldn't live, m'm, where there ain't more things kep'."

Another, the second day, began to remark, "This ain't my work," which remark she made unceasingly, until requested to leave.

All these damsels seemed highly-educated, but one, named Amelia, "took the cake" in the matter of education, if not in house-work.

"Why, where did you learn to sweep?" I asked her one day, seeing her raise clouds of dust with a broom.

"Well, m'm, I ain't had much experience of sweeping, but I can do crool-work, and play the pianner beautiful."

"Well," I said incautiously, "it's a pity you don't take lessons in sweeping from little Jane next door. I don't know about her crewel-work, but she keeps the house like a new pin."

"That girl!" Amelia cried contemptuously, flourishing her broom. "I've been at school with 'er. Why, the girl's a perfect fool. She were past twelve year old, and couldn't move the decimal point."

I was bound to confess that though much more than twelve years old myself, neither could I move the decimal point—whatever that may be.

And here, before I close my paper, I would like to make a few general remarks. There should be some previous training required for service. In no other profession is no apprenticeship required, and yet, no one will deny that this requires an apprenticeship quite as much as any other. Girls are received into service, are paid wages at once, while all the time they may know nothing, or next to nothing, of their work, and what experience they do gain is generally at the expense of their employer. "Crool-work" and



"I CAN DO CROOL-WORK AND PLAY THE PIANNER BEAUTIFUL."

"pianner playing," or even the power of moving the decimal point, are but poor substitutes for diligence and honesty in service. And the girls' mothers are to blame for this as much as and more than the Board Schools. The mothers, as I heard one of the wise among them remark, "bring their girls up too soft." They teach them nothing, and treat them as delicate plants, on which the wind must not blow too roughly. Yet they imagine that these useless incumbrances deserve high wages, while the incumbrances themselves, like Amelia, think that they confer upon you

a high favour by remaining. But the learned Amelia was my last trial of her kind. Since then I have eschewed all dealings with young servant girls, whether ignorant or educated, and have got, instead, a nice, respectable, middle-aged woman, who has passed through the *sturm und drang* period of her life, and has had time to develop a conscience and understanding of her own, and to learn the first great principles of all useful service: not a mere smattering of badly-taught machine work, or an incomplete top-dressing of science and art.

THE SLEEVE OF CARE.

By C. E. C. WEIGALL, Author of "The Temptation of Dulce Carruthers," etc. etc. etc.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.



O, dear, *nothing*, positively *nothing*, will reconcile me to it," said Mrs. Humphreys, with feeble stubbornness and a suspicious quiver in her voice.

"Mother, dearie, I *am* so sorry, but it is inevitable—you must see that it is inevitable," answered Tessie, with quick vivacious utterance, and all the assurance of nineteen years. "How can we all go on living on one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and have meat to eat every day, or even a scrape of butter on our bread? Phyllis or I *must* go out as a governess, and it is only fortunate that we have both been decently educated, and fitted for the position."

"What will Raymond say?" said Phyllis, looking up with a sudden flash of mischief in her quiet eyes.

"What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?" quoted Tessie with fine scorn. "And what on earth has Raymond to do with the matter?"

"Oh, my dear, I did not say that when I was engaged to your poor dear father," put in Mrs. Humphreys tremulously.

"Is it the same? I ask you, dear mother, do you imagine that I am in *love* with Raymond?"

Tessie looked down at her mother with an amused smile.

"Tessie," began her mother plaintively; but the girl was speaking again in a meditative fashion, with her eyes wandering away to the quaint little street outside.

"Miss Dale told me that the test of being in love was blushing when you thought of the man you loved. Now, I ask you, Phyllis, did you ever see me blush when Raymond's name was mentioned?"

"I think, perhaps," said her sister cautiously, "that you care for him rather more than you think."

"Well, anyhow, '*revenons à nos moutons*,'" rejoined Tessie carelessly. "In spite of what the whole world says, I am going to help my family."

"What a dreadful thing it is to be sure," groaned Mrs. Humphreys wearily. "Are you *quite* sure, dear, that you have hunted everywhere to see whether a few bank-notes may not have been carelessly stuffed away by someone in your dear father's lifetime?"

Tessie shook her head, but her mother continued—

"I know that once when I was a girl I came across a five-pound note in an old book—a "Breeches" Bible or some such curiosity, and I think it quite possible, my dear, that I may have, perhaps—quite accidentally, of course, marked some book with a bank-note. What do you think?"

She looked so eagerly up from the sofa where she was lying, into her daughter's face that Tessie's eyes dimmed with tears as she answered her—

"No, dear, everything was overhauled when papa died; and, besides, since the sale we have not so many places left where notes might be hidden."

She took her mother's hand caressingly in hers, and looked down with intense pity at the frail, crape-gowned figure of the mother who had all her life through been thought for, and shielded from every trouble and anxiety.

It seemed to be so hard that now, at the very time when Mrs. Humphreys most needed comforts, she should be deprived of them at one blow. And Tessie's quick thoughts sped back to her father's death in the old home, and to their sudden discovery that the carelessness of their lawyer had deprived them of the greater part of their income; then to the sale of their treasures, and their arrival at the little furnished house among the Yorkshire hills and moors, where they had taken refuge.

Phyllis, on her knees at her mother's side, took the other white, diamond-ringed hand in hers, and pressed her lips gently upon it.

She was the silent, brown-haired daughter, whose insignificant features formed such a foil for Tessie's perfect beauty.

But, at the same time, Phyllis was capable of a good