

wooden Virgin, "see my poor worn chaplet, how it is wasted with fingerings! Day after day thou knowest I have prayed here in vain, yet day after day my faith brings me back before thee. I promised Léon I would pray for him night and morning till the beads were worn out; and, dear Lady, thou seest I have kept my promise.

"Look how the beads are, so small and thin, and one or two here and there I have mended with sealing-wax. If he come not soon, they will all be worn away, and who will then believe in Our Lady of the Grotto? Oh, Blessed Mother, send him back—send him back at once to me! My poor, poor eyes are sore and red with crying. I ask you for Léon, for Léon only, dear Lady. How small a thing it is for you to bring him back, and how great a thing for me—oh! how happy—how happy!"

Even as she spoke, from the gloom behind the shrine and the shadow of the image a figure seemed to rise and emerge into the lamplight. At the rustling of its clothes Léonie sobbed and trembled. Could this be, indeed, Our Lady herself, appearing once more as she had appeared to Marie Bella? Could it be that such grace was vouchsafed to her—a sinner?

Our Lady or not, 'twas indeed a miracle;

for next instant she heard the sound of a well-known voice—

"Oh, Léonie, Léonie! it is me—it is Léon! I have heard all you prayed. Our Lady has brought me!"

He had come from Marseilles to Toulon that day, and, walking homeward by the slope of the Coudon, had dropped into the Saint Baume, unobserved and unrecognised. And now, in front of the very shrine itself, he pressed her to his heart and murmured again and again—

"Léonie, Léonie, my pomegranate, I have come home to marry you."

From that moment forth, the Saint Baume recovered all its ancient sanctity. The cry went abroad—"A miracle! a miracle!"

The girls of the neighbourhood go there now to pray every night of the week in perfect squadrons. Not a Virgin in the Var has so great a reputation among the unmarried populace. Her tinselled dress stands covered with gewgaws; her lamps burn bright; her Stations of the Cross are fresh glazed and re-painted.

The *curé* himself can no longer hold out; and even the Professor, Voltairian though he be, assured me with fervour as he told me the tale that the presence of the Madonna is no longer doubtful to him.



DO SERVANTS MARRY?



Some time ago a large English party chanced to have occasion to travel along the Riviera, and to spend six months in getting from Marseilles to Genoa. The family was truly British in its extent and quality, comprising babies, children, adolescents; yet all it boasted in the way of service was one small, black-eyed, rustic nursemaid of the Susan Nipper type. This nursemaid, Rose, was sixteen, unsophisticated and apple-cheeked; flirting to her was, like euchre to the Heathen Chinese, a game she did not understand; she could speak no tongue but her own; she was

in sole charge of a baby six months old; yet, with all these well-nigh insuperable obstacles, she managed, in the short space of three months, to become engaged successively to a French and a German courier, two English valets, an Italian head waiter, and a Sicilian "traveller" in the comb line, to say nothing of numerous innocent little flirtations, *pour passer le temps*, with page-boys and hotel porters. And yet some people will consider that domestic service is a bar to matrimony! Of course, it may be said that foreign travel presents opportunities that do not occur in well-regulated, stay-at-home households; but yet, even here there is the evening out, the long desert—or perhaps we should say the oasis—of Sunday afternoons, the journeys to the post or to "buy a bit of ribbon"; all these "shining hours," if duly "improved," are so many stepping-stones to matrimony. Then there is a certain domesticity to be found in servant girls that is not without its attraction—that domesticity which, as anyone will know who happens to

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read the letters in the *Daily Telegraph* in the silly season, is so dear to the heart of the great middle-class of our nation. It is more likely that a girl who has had every day to cook or do household work will be thrifty



"GROSVENOR PLACE."

and contriving, than one who has served as a shop-girl, or, say, as a type-writer. Though even our humble bread-winners, in proposing marriage, have not yet attained to the German Shibboleth of "Can you cook?" still, it is likely that the art of cooking will not be without its charm to the ordinary mortal.

Marriage, after all—why should we blink the fact?—is the natural aim of most working girls. It is proper that it should be so. Even when girls are not by way of being devoted to the other sex, they cannot help seeing that marriage generally offers the best investment in the bank of life. Not, perhaps, always a safe investment: some pessimists might rather call it a "lottery." But say it is an investment; well, when it pays, its dividend may reach unlimited sums; or call it a lottery, there are more prizes to be drawn than blanks; and then there is no girl, however unkindly treated by Nature or by fortune, but thinks she has a chance of a prize. Is it, therefore, wonderful that the average servant girl should be careless of savings-bank books, and should spend her money freely on dress? Dress is a kind of investment in its way, for it is certainly a means to an end. How much

pleasanter, when age or illness creeps upon you, to have a strong arm ready to work for you than to toil on, lonely and suffering; or perhaps, when you have given the best part of your life to other people, to go into the "big villa," as the poor call the workhouse. Of course, there is a reverse to the picture: one may have a drunken husband, sickly children; and yet I confess that of all claimants to sympathy the poor and lonely spinster has always seemed to me the most pitiable.

The great bar to servants marrying appears to me to be set up not by domestic service in itself, but by the attitude of the mistresses. Mistresses, as a class—if you can classify at all where there are so many differences—are absolutely unsympathetic to servants' love affairs. They ought to see that it is best in every way for a servant to have opportunities of marrying; yet they will put every possible obstruction in the way of so-called "followers." Thus we have seen kindly women, who will allow their own daughters to go, say, to three parties per week, not only prohibit a male visitor in the kitchen, but draw a hard-and-fast rule that a servant is not to have more than one evening a fortnight out: that she is even then to be in punctually by nine o'clock. And yet to their own daughters marriage is by no means such a necessity as to the servants, to whom it represents daily bread without hard labour. Irritating and unnecessary restrictions and rules really do amount to a kind of tyranny, and do much to make "service" more disliked than it need be. Besides, the families from which servant girls are mostly drawn do not restrict their daughters as do the richer folk. They may be perfectly respectable, and yet they see no harm in a girl meeting a comparative stranger and taking an evening walk with him. They do not unnecessarily burden themselves with the duties of chaperonage. It is not their way of doing things. Their girls are perforce early taught to be independent, to take care of themselves. Why, then, should the employers of the girls be so unduly strict, giving them a rule of life which their own daughters could not keep?

But times have changed, and are changing, for the domestic servant. Many things have tended to the change—progress, culture, education, new ideas of what is degrading and what is not. Old George Herbert's words have come to be realised at last, and we know that—

"Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine."

Even the most starched and old-fashioned of mistresses now find themselves obliged to

alter their procedure, lest they should get no servants at all.

Of course, in servants, as in employers, there are many kinds and degrees. There is a wider gulf between the "smart" waiting-maid in Grosvenor Place and the poor "slavey" at a dirty boarding-house than there is between a duchess and a country grocer's wife. Servants cannot be generalised as a class. The type we will more particularly consider just now is the "general servant" or "girl" employed in so many middle-class households. These are in some ways the most down-trodden of any, and have the fewest pleasures or opportunities. If over-worked in large and not too rich families, they are much to be pitied; but if they happen to live alone with, say, an old maid, their lot is not generally so hard. For old maids are, by a curious freak of Nature, often more sympathetic in love affairs than married women. For instance, that most charming of old maids, Miss Matty of "Cranford"—who can say that she is not true to life? and how sweet and considerate is her speech to her general servant Martha—the speech that she has taken such elaborate pains to prepare:—

"And perhaps, Martha, you may some time meet with a young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have followers; but if you meet with such a young man and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. God forbid!" said she, in a low voice, "that I should grieve any young hearts."

Miss Matty has been brooding over the days of her youth and lost romance. But if everybody cannot be like Mrs. Gaskell's sweet old heroine, at any rate we too have known old maids whose only wish was to get all their successive servants well and happily married. They were for ever devising opportunities and places for meeting—charity concerts, church entertainments, etc.; but we believe that even they occasionally came across some who proved obstinate and unamenable. Some girls—few, it is true, but still, some—have a real indifference to men. This was notably the case with a girl who, though in some ways an ideal servant, could never be induced to speak favourably of any man. If a painter or plumber, or man of any kind, came to the house, Mary always viewed him with mistrust and suspicion, and afterwards she would complain of his dirty boots or rude ways; in fact, she behaved very much as would the superior of a convent that had been sacrilegiously broken into.

"Do you dislike men?" I inquired one day, rather injudiciously.

"I neither like them, nor do I dislike them," she replied oracularly. "I think nothing at all about them, one way or other." This was certainly unpromising; I felt snubbed. Besides, I was no farther forward; and the whole incident reminded me of when, as a child, I had asked an old farmer "What he thought of Shakespeare?" and had been answered: "I think nothing but good of him." Very satisfactory, no doubt, but hardly enlightening.

It very often happens that the nicest women—whether "in service" or otherwise—are those who are not attracted by and do not attract men. The average man is so misguided in liking precisely those qualities in a wife which do not "wear." It is, however—we will freely acknowledge—more common for girls to be too much interested in men than too little. This latter kind of girl is not rare in any class. From her own account, she has a proposal every week; and, if a servant, is always gossiping with the baker's boy or the postman. The most pronounced type of this sort of girl that I have ever known was called Marianne. She had a quite general and unbiassed partiality for men's society, and she had a way of asking stray young men into the house to devour all my freshly-cut ham—which, to say the least of it, was trying. If ever a plumber or a



"WALKING OUT WITH A CHAP."

carpenter chanced to arrive on the scene, Marianne was sure to offer help—she has even been known not to despise a tramp. On occasions when I have had to reprimand her for this failing of hers, she has manifested extreme innocence and surprise; and on one occasion, when a showily-dressed loafer was lounging near the house, and Marianne's head, with its fuzzy crop of curls, was hanging, like Jezebel's, out of an upper window, I called the girl, and said to her: "You are very foolish to try to attract that man's attention."

"Me, miss!" cried Marianne, with her air of injured innocence, "*me* attract him! I should like to 'it 'im, I should."

This only shows how deceptive appearances may be, for I should certainly never have suspected Marianne of wanting to hit him.

Among girls of Marianne's type there are three distinct stages of courtship: firstly, "walking out with a chap"; secondly, "keeping company with a feller"; thirdly, "being engaged to a young man." None of these, however, are necessarily binding; perhaps the most binding contract to their ideas, if any, is represented by the gift and acceptance of an "engagement ring," however trashy and cheap the said ring may be. Even the black-eyed "nursemaid" mentioned at the beginning of this paper was not proof against the power of the magic ring. This poor little Susan Nipper, after her numerous flirtations with couriers and lordly valets with gold watch-chains, married in the end a raw gardener's boy of twenty—an apple-faced youth, of a stodgy and unprepossessing exterior; and why? Because he had been the first to present her with a five-and-sixpenny trinket. A well-to-do farmer proposed to her—she liked him better, and she even consulted me with tears.

"Well, Rose," I said, "which do you really like best?"

"I like Tom best," she wept, "he's got such a way with him. I'd settle for him directly, but you see, miss, *there's the ring.*"

So the tawdry trinket settled her fleeting affections once and for all. Engagement rings, we see, are not without their uses.

Servants of the type of Marianne and Rose—if they do not happen to boast of "a chap," "a feller," or "a young man"—are generally more or less listless and dull. On the other hand, if they happen to be "engaged," they are apt to be pre-occupied, and therefore

thoughtless; so that with them it is a choice of evils. A girl I know of was once plunged into the extremest woe because her "young man" had not written for two days. She showed her grief by lying flat on the kitchen-floor, her heels tapping the floor, *à la* Miss Miggs. Bromide of potassium had to be administered to calm her nerves, and it eventually transpired that the "young man" had merely sprained his thumb!

You can generally recognise the romantic servant girl by her being very much addicted to reading penny and threepenny novelettes, of the gaudy kind usually to be seen on railway bookstalls, and of which, alas! such numbers are daily sold. They usually treat of very high society indeed; if a mill-girl or a housemaid is by any chance alluded to, it is only in order that she may marry a duke, or a baronet's son at least. All the young women (in the illustrations) are represented as "sporting" little sailor hats and very tight waists; while young men are shown proposing to them in abnormally high hats and faultless frock-coats without one crease. No wonder these books turn girls' heads. After long-continued perusal of them, they must doubtless consider it an anomaly for anyone to marry in their own class at all; they must expect a Prince Charming to be lurking in every area. And the lovers they read of propose in the most high-flown language, which no doubt disappoints them when it comes to the reality. A servant of mine happened to meet at a flower-show with a young man who subsequently "kept company" with her. I inquired how the affair had come about. "How did he propose to you?" I said.

"It was like this," said Jane: "Jest as I was a-goin' orf, 'e ses, 'Jane, 'e ses, 'I should like to see more of yer.'"

"Yes," said I, interested; "and what did you say to that?"

"I ses, 'Oh, stuff and nonsense! Git along with yer.'"

There is much cry now about the dearth of good servants. Let, then, the employers see to it that they treat their servants as human beings, with wishes and interests in no way differing from their own, and let them not seek to deny them all that is sweet and pleasant in life.

Above all, let them not discourage respectable aspirants—remembering that, whether discouraged or no, the aspirants will come—for, as the irrepressible Sam Weller said: "It's natur."

