



PAYING OCCUPATIONS
for Gentlewomen

HOME WORK

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H, I am weary of hearing about the condition of working girls and the doings of lady lawyers, lady doctors, lady journalists, and lady engineers. They don't need sympathy and suggestions half so

much as we poor gentlewomen. Why doesn't someone tell us what to do to earn our daily bread with an occasional bit of butter on it?"

This touching plaint came from an English-woman, educated, refined, and aptly described by the word "domesticated" or "homely." To her I made the suggestion that she start a boarding-house for American visitors in London, and now again, in taking up the subject of home work for gentlewomen, I will first refer to the establishment of a boarding-house for my country people, who in the spring, summer and autumn are to be found in London by the hundreds wandering about with their eyes full of tears and their pockets

full of money, complaining that since they left home they have not had anything "fit to eat!" By that expression they mean to imply that they are unable to find real American cookery in London, and that in all the Metropolis there is not a place where they can obtain a typical American meal. They may order what their appetites crave, but according to their tastes it is spoiled in the cooking, not properly seasoned, underdone, or not hot enough, and so I put to several dozens of domesticated gentlewomen the question, why do you not establish some boarding-houses where these people's wants may be looked after, and the ladies receive in exchange a very liberal supply of American dollars?

It may be said that in London, especially in the Bloomsbury district, there are hundreds of boarding and lodging-houses carried on for the benefit of American visitors. These places, according to the advertisements by which they entrap my all-too-trusting and unsuspecting countrypeople, pay "particular attention to American cooking." But the fact is, that neither the proprietors nor their servants know the first principles of American cookery.

Taking it for granted that the gentlewoman has her house which she can fit up for the reception of boarders, or is able to secure a furnished house, she must first either prepare herself to be her own cook by studying and practising the recipes of a genuine American cookery book (written by an American and not an Englishwoman), or make an effort to secure the services of an American negro cook, for personal observations of the English

"plain" and "professed" cooks lead me to believe that they can never learn American cookery. The coloured cook may be obtained by advertising in a New York, or better, a Southern paper. Her steerage passage over must be paid, but in the long run her wages will not amount to more than those paid to a professed cook. The next step is to advertise for boarders, and above all things to avoid placarding the house. Let the newspaper advertisement state that genuine American cooking (either by the lady herself or an American servant) is to be had, and that good prices are asked for first-class accommodations. The house will soon be filled by guests who will remain during their whole stay in London, and will send over a horde of other Americans the following season, provided the lady of the house does not attempt to economise on them. Let her once attempt any petty economy that is apparent to her boarders, and she is lost. She herself may not approve of American cooking, or the American style of keeping house, but that is no reason why she should not cater to the wants of her boarders, and when their wants are once understood, it is an easy matter for a clever woman to gratify them.

I have in mind the case of a New York woman whose husband was entertaining an Englishman. She discovered that her guest ate no breakfast, always politely refusing the tempting hot biscuit, lamb chops, coffee, and buckwheat cakes, and she was greatly distressed over the matter. When she afterwards learned that he could have been made happy with a wafer of bacon, some marmalade, and a cup of tea, she exclaimed, "What a pity I did not know that; so simple and so cheap!"

Now, the Englishwoman who attempts to cook for American boarders will not, perhaps, find it "so simple and so cheap," but she can, nevertheless, supply what is wanted for a consideration. The American man wants his peas "smothered in butter." He wants his coffee with pure cream from the dairy, and not condensed in jugs. He demands hot rolls or pancakes every morning for breakfast. All his vegetables, to suit him, should be boiled very much longer than is the custom in England. He likes peas and beans cooked slowly for an hour instead of twenty minutes, all soups seasoned before being brought to the table, fish cooked until it is soft, chickens thoroughly cooked, and with all the hairs singed from them before cooking. The American man complains that when he spends a few months sight-seeing in London he is able to find none of these things in the hotels or boarding-houses. Let a number of gentlewomen undertake to supply him with them. They need not develop into typical

landladies, even though they become cooks. With the assistance of kitchen maids to do the rough work and clear away, the mere matter of cooking would not be unpleasant. Attention should also be paid to the heating of the houses if the American boarders are to remain throughout the winter. Every room and landing in the house should be heated by gas grates, since no American was ever known to keep warm by means of a fire-place. Then, too, the fitting up with gas grates will make a great saving of time, and so diminish the number of servants who would be required if hearths needed attention. But let no one start out in such an undertaking without first being familiar with American methods of cooking and housekeeping. That is the greatest essential.

Another occupation which it has often occurred to me might be taken up by gentlewomen to their own advantage, and that of a large part of the public, is laundry work. By this, of course, I do not mean the actual washing and ironing of clothes, but the establishment of a small laundry where they might supervise the work. I speak of this under the department of "Home Work," with the idea that it could be carried on by those gentlewomen who reside, not in London, but in the country, or in the smaller towns outside of London which are easily reached by train.

Who among us has not become disgusted with the ordinary ignorant washerwomen, and the managers of the large steam laundries, who every week send our finest cambric and linen home to us with the lace torn from too violent scrubbing and boiling, and, worse than that, disfigured with great ugly letters and numbers done in red, yellow, blue or green coarse cotton, which tears holes in our clothing, besides taking away its dainty appearance? Even real lace handkerchiefs are subjected to this objectionable style of "marking," and not a laundress or laundry proprietor but insists that it is absolutely necessary for purposes of identification. Stockings, too, are seldom washed in clean water, and so are returned with lint adhering to them, and the towels are ironed with the fringes in knots, instead of being properly combed out. The highest class laundries do their work in this objectionable way.

Laundry work has been looked upon as something requiring physical strength instead of education or refinement. Hence, when I advise gentlewomen in the country to start laundries, there may be some who will look aghast at the very idea. Yet the running of a laundry would be a lucrative business for them, and one which would require but

little capital for its starting. Even a London woman might move to the country, hiring a most comfortable and convenient little house with a sunny garden for fifty or sixty pounds a year, or even less. She could secure the services of two washerwomen at low wages, and two girls for ironing, one for plain and one for finely trimmed clothes. She needs no steam-engine to run her works, only tubs, boiler, wash-boards, clothes-pegs, and clothes-lines. All of which would cost her little more than two pounds. In order to secure customers let her either write personally to her friends or advertise. Hundreds and thousands of people would prefer to have their linen washed and dried in the good old-fashioned way, and if in the advertisement an assurance is given that no cotton is to be used in marking the clothes, that one statement will bring many customers. For purposes of identification, the Chinese system of attaching by a single thread a small tag when the clothes are received, and removing it before they are returned, is all that is necessary. The gentlewoman who herself has suffered from the handling of the ordinary laundress, will understand how linen should look after it has been laundried, and her chief business will be to instruct her workwomen in the proper way and to insist that they *follow* those instructions. The clothes may be returned either by train or messenger to their owners. If the latter method is decided to be the best, there would be little difficulty in securing a country working man to undertake the receiving and delivery of the clothes, giving up to this work two days in the week.

In connection with such a laundry there might be a mending department. This part of the work the lady herself could do, and thus add materially to her profits. Bachelors and busy professional women would particularly appreciate this department, and would be only too willing to pay an extra sixpence or shilling for the pleasure of having their clothes always in repair.

There are two employments in which American women are quietly engaged which are, I think, quite unknown here. One of these is glove-cleaning and glove-mending, which may be done at home quite as well as in a shop. Benzine, or Benzine Collas, and a large amount of patience are needed for the cleaning, while for the mending, one may purchase little packets of silk, including about two dozen different shades for one shilling. Here, again, let the lady wishing to undertake this work advertise for customers. Indeed, the advertisement column is the best and often the only medium for obtaining employment in all of the occupations to which I refer.

The ordinary cleaners are in the habit of retaining gloves for a week or ten days, so let the gentlewoman be careful to advertise that she will return them in two or three days. Let the price for cleaning and mending long evening gloves be sixpence, and for short ones threepence.

There are in all the large cities of the United States various branches of an association which is known as "The Woman's Exchange," to which ladies may send hand-made underwear, laces, artistic decorations, and home-made bread, cakes, pies, canned goods, preserves, jellies, and pickles, to be sold on commission. Although there are places of a similar kind in London, there is one respect in which they differ from the American "Woman's Exchange." That is, the neglect of the matter of home cookery. Hand-painted ornaments and beautiful specimens of needlework are to be found at these London markets, but as yet no one seems to have thought of making the Exchange a means of disposing of culinary dainties. Might not a number of English gentlewomen add materially to their incomes in this way, or indeed, make a business of creating and supplying a department of this kind? If the Exchanges now established should refuse to lead in this new departure, an enterprising woman with business ability and a very small amount of capital at her command, might do well to start such an Exchange, inviting gentlewomen to send her specimens of their skill in the culinary art, to be sold on a commission of eight or ten per cent., as is done in America. A very little advertising would call the attention of the public to the existence of such an Exchange, and there can be no doubt that it would be well patronised.

Needlework is a thing in which the majority of English gentlewomen excel, yet I think there are but few of them who have thought of attempting a rivalry with the Frenchwomen who send their hand-made underwear to the London shops to be sold for fabulous prices. Now, in the matter of fine hand-sewing of this kind, there would seem to be no reason why purchasers should not be supplied with dainty *lingerie* made by Englishwomen. At any rate, there is nothing to prevent Englishwomen from advertising their skill in this direction, and by that means obtaining a number of private customers. Even a perfectly plain hand-made night-dress or petticoat is looked upon as far daintier than a much ruffled and tucked machine-made article, so that if gentlewomen who are skilled in this direction would advertise their prices as being low, they would no doubt secure customers. It may be very humbling and

trying to one's pride to be obliged to do things cheap in order to obtain work, yet it is the only way to attract custom at the start, after which one's price may be raised and the custom still retained on account of the excellence of the work.

There is another department of needlework which merits the consideration of gentlewomen who are wishing for employment. It is the re-making of old-fashioned dresses into garments of the latest style. London is over-run with so-called "Court dressmakers," but ladies who have tried to find among them any who would take the necessary time and trouble to convert an expensive last year's dress into one of the present year's style, know how nearly impossible it is to get such work done satisfactorily. Might not gentlewomen undertake this work in their own homes? Not being myself an accomplished seamstress, I am unable to give full particulars as to how the transformation is brought about; but I have heard a bright little Englishwoman assert that she has this year remade three old dresses into fashionable gowns by putting into the skirts gores cut from the sleeves in order to give them the required width. To be sure, there are always to be found numerous seamstresses who go out by the day "re-making and repairing" dresses, but they are usually devoid of all intelligence or ideas concerning style. The gentlewoman, however, having been herself accustomed to dressing well and associating with well-dressed people, is in a position to undertake work of this kind, and, by a little judicious advertising would be able to carry it on quietly at home, with one or two assistants, without even so much as having a sign on her door.

I have recently heard of a London girl who is clearing a profit of between two and three pounds weekly by making and selling that toilet preparation which nearly every woman has on her dressing-table—cold cream—to a number of customers whom she has obtained through friends and advertising. Reverses of fortune having made it necessary for her to economise in every direction, she decided that unless she could make her own cold cream she must do without it. She found it very simply and cheaply made by the thorough beating together of certain proportions of almond oil, spermaceti, white wax, and rose-water. Having found herself able to make for eightpence an amount for which a chemist would charge about four shillings, it occurred to her that she might turn her knowledge to account; so she made arrangements to supply her friends with the article at a much cheaper rate than they had been accustomed to paying, and with a good profit

to herself. The article she manufactured was superior to that sold by many chemists, because of her conscientiousness in stirring and beating the mixture five times as long as most chemists do. This, and other simple toilet preparations, for which recipes are easily obtained, would be a source of great profit to those who would venture upon them.

Type-writing is a home occupation which, notwithstanding the many engaged in it, is not yet over-crowded. Starting out with a good, common sense education, a knowledge of spelling and punctuation, and clever fingers, there is no reason why a gentlewoman should not become an expert typist in from six to eight weeks—that is, provided she devotes from three to six hours a day to practice. She may either buy a machine on the cash or instalment system, or hire one for thirty shillings a month. All necessary instructions will be given her by the parties from whom she purchases or hires the machine, so that she need expend no money in learning. If she has a large acquaintance among business and professional men she will doubtless find patrons among them; but if not, she must invest a few shillings in advertising; and, while speaking of advertising, I would lay stress upon the importance of an originally worded advertisement. The hackneyed "officer's widow" or "clergyman's daughter" who "appeals most earnestly," etc., is not the kind of advertisement to insert. Let the advertisement appeal, not to the sympathies, but to the business ideas of her desired customers or employers. Only a day or two ago I noticed in one of the papers an advertisement which stated that "an army officer's widow wanted employment of any kind." No particular line of work was indicated, and I doubt if any answers were received. Let the gentlewoman who advertises be careful to state just what she can do. For example, if she should decide to start a laundry such as I have indicated, let her lay particular stress upon the fact that she does not mark her clothes with cotton; if she advertises as a maker of cold cream, say it is thoroughly beaten; and if as a typist, it would be well to refer particularly to her abilities in punctuating. This is a matter of the greatest importance in type-writing. Fortunes may be made or lost for one's employer by the use or misuse of a comma. So let the gentlewoman who essays to get type-writing to do at home advertise the fact that she understands the rules of punctuation. Let her remember, in advertising for any employment, that she should not be backward in calling attention to any point in which she excels.