

DOMESTIC SERVICE AS A PROFESSION FOR GENTLEWOMEN.



N these days of overcrowded professions, and with so many women of all classes forced to earn their own livelihood, it becomes very difficult for girls of moderate abilities to decide on a career. Although theoretically almost all professions are open to women, practically the number is very limited, especially for those who cannot afford the out-

lay required by a university graduation or the study of medicine. Nursing and teaching are the most popular professions for such, but the ranks of both are terribly overcrowded; and the remuneration for ninety per cent. of either nurses or teachers is decidedly small, and the number of years during which they can obtain good posts is also very limited.

The teaching of technical subjects was considered a paying occupation a few years ago, and therefore girls crowded to the training-schools and classes and obtained diplomas for laundry-work, cookery, dressmaking, and dairy-work, only to find the work extremely hard and the number of well-paid posts very small. Those who are doing this now say that it is getting worse and worse because the classes are frequently given to Board School teachers and the number of applicants for any good situation is very large. One teacher holding a good County Council position knows there are over thirty people waiting to take her post when she resigns!

On the other hand one hears everywhere the outcry for domestic servants, and mistresses say they would give anything for a good one. Whether this is literally meant in many cases is doubtful, but it certainly is a fact that the demand for good maids is very great.

There is nothing lowering in domestic work unless we make it so; it is not what we do, but what we are that constitutes our claim to be called gentlewomen; and yet how many girls consider it quite beneath their dignity to do domestic work, or if they do it prefer to be called "lady helps." Nursing was thought degrading a few years ago, but to-day even members of the Royal Family are glad to be trained as nurses that they may minister to their loved ones or help the poor and suffering. People said that the study of medicine would detract from the womanliness of women, but if the right women study, they come out better at the end, and nowhere will you find more helpful, tender women than in the medical profession.

Some years ago a quaint booklet called *Blessed be Drudgery* was published—W. Gannet, I believe, is the author—and in it the writer sought to prove that art was in every form of work, and that any man might be an artist in his own line. As examples, he mentions two shoemakers, one of whom when asked how long it took to learn his trade replied, "Twenty years, and then you must travel;" the other's answer to the same question was, "All your life." Why can we not bring this spirit into the round of household duties? And if we wish to follow Charles Kingsley's advice to

"Do the thing that's next you,
Tho' it's dull at whiles;
Helping, when you meet them,
Lame dogs over stiles!"

there are few more practical ways than by becoming really good domestic servants and helping to smooth the troubles of worried housewives.

An ardent temperance worker on hearing that a friend intended to take up cookery as a profession, talked to her seriously about throwing away her life and living among the sordidness of food and pots and pans! Was such a remark in keeping with her principles? Surely there is no system of temperance work so likely to prove successful as the providing of well-cooked food and temperance beverages. The good that might be done in this way is

immense; but apart from that, as I said before, it is the spirit in which we do our work, more than the labour itself, that harms or improves us. The quaint words of the old poet, George Herbert, well express this—

"Who sweeps a room as to Thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine."

That there is scope for the work of educated women in domestic service there is no doubt; and many of those who have tried it are proofs of the healthfulness and even pleasantness of the life. Several girls, trained as technical teachers have found that work too hard, and so have taken situations as "lady servants," and find their present positions suit them far better, and they positively enjoy the work, while the certificates they hold enable them to command good salaries.

In order to band together gentlewomen willing to engage in this work, there is a "Guild of Dames of the Household" (President, Miss Nixon, "Mona," Tivoli, Cheltenham, who will be glad to hear from ladies willing to be trained), which provides training for gentlewomen between twenty and thirty-five years of age. It is through the kindness of ladies who have large staffs of servants that this training is obtained, and cooks also attend cookery-classes. The time taken is from one to four weeks or longer. No charge is made for rooms or training, but 10s. per week is the cost of full board, or single meals are provided at a very reasonable rate.

The "dames" are also put in communication with mistresses requiring their services, and Miss Nixon says that the demand for such is far greater than the supply. Caps are not always worn, but some wear a very becoming one with a band of willow-pattern sateen supplied by the Guild. Special aprons and a Guild badge are always used.

Mistresses are required to provide separate bedrooms, give a fair amount of leisure time, and from £18 to £30 per annum. Higher salaries than those named are sometimes obtainable. One lady, known to the writer, gives £35 to her housemaid who has a laundry certificate, and although she does no washing, she is required to do starching and ironing. The same mistress gives £30 to her parlourmaid. Another lady pays especially high wages to her two maids on the understanding that if they require extra help they must pay for it, and those maids like their posts very much and find the work easy and their position a pleasant one.

In the advertisement columns of a daily paper, among vacant situations I see "Lady-cook (kitchenmaid kept), £32"; ditto, £50; lady-nurse, £30, etc.

Those who do not need training will find the fortnightly lists issued by the Central Bureau of the Women's Employment League, 60, Chancery Lane, W.C., a good medium for advertisements, and many ladies requiring gentlewomen advertise there.

In most families employing ladies, help is given with the harder and rougher kinds of work, such as scrubbing, and the maids are rarely, if ever, expected to do any washing. It has been found so much more satisfactory to have all gentlewomen in a house that it is now quite easy to get a post in such a family, the old style of lady-helps being found difficult to manage.

For nurses there is the Norland Institute, where training is given in all matters relating to the management of children, including a few months' experience in a children's hospital. The course there is one or two years, and the nurses have the additional attraction of a charming uniform!

One great advantage of domestic service as a profession is the healthfulness of it. The work offers great variety and plenty of exercise. It is not so mechanical as that of many clerks, and offers sufficient scope for intelligence to prevent one becoming dull.

Of course books and intercourse with one's equals are necessary to all, and every gentlewoman who enters this

profession must take care not to allow herself to sink in her intellectual attainments. One mistress who has had a large and satisfactory experience with lady-servants says that many of her maids have been provided with introductions from their doctor, clergyman, or other friends, and have quite a little social circle of their own.

Another advantage is that training and experience in household matters are so valuable to all classes of women. Probably more than half of the trouble about domestic

servants to-day is owing to the incompetence of mistresses who, not knowing what work really is, expect impossibilities, and so get less than they otherwise would do. From the lowest to the highest, every woman ought to understand how to manage a house, and a few years of domestic service would be a splendid training for future mistresses, and the "dames" will make far better wives and mothers in consequence of their experience.

ALIX JOSON.

MARQUETRY, OR COLOURED WOOD INLAYING.

THE old furniture was charmingly ornamented with inlays, and there can be no question that inlaid decoration is the most appropriate way of ornamenting cabinet work, as it is one of the most durable. A great revival has taken place within the last few years in this class of work, and at the annual exhibition at the Albert Hall of works made in villages under the supervision of the Home Arts Association, some quite charming effects are obtained by the use of coloured inlays.

I was much struck, too, by the use of inlays in some of the modern French furniture known as *L'Art Nouveau*.* A more naturalistic treatment was adopted by these French workers than we associate with inlays, and yet a charming decorative feeling was observed, so that the inlays did not pretend to be painted decoration, though the utmost effect was obtained by the careful disposition of the various coloured woods employed. Another feature of this French marquetry was the introduction of a sort of landscape

effect by cutting some of the inlays like trees against the sky-line, allowing the motifs to come across these landscape effects. I have endeavoured to illustrate what I mean in the two designs, but my readers must remember that what is intended to be in colour has a very different effect when translated into black and white. I have devoted a chapter in my book entitled "*Art Crafts for Amateurs*" to the consideration of inlays, and though my space here is very limited, I will give my readers a few practical hints which I hope will help them in their work.

The French use woods such as walnut, birch, and mahogany, which have a very decided grain, and they stain it in such a way that instead of getting the whole surface one tint, it is light in some places and dark in others. They then cut out spaces which suggest a line of trees, and by inlaying these in some dark wood obtain the effect suggested in the sketches accompanying these notes. The foliage is then taken over this. The design of the inlays should be drawn on paper full size and transferred to the wood, and then with a sharp knife—a fixed blade in a wooden handle such as can be

* Examples of this modern French work can be seen at the Bethnal Green Museum.



MARQUETRY, OR STAINED WOOD DECORATION, SUGGESTED BY L'ART NOUVEAU. (*The elder in flower is the motif.*)