HOW I ENGAGE MY SERVANTS.

Am sure many people on first reading the heading of this article will exclaim, "How you engage your servants! what a useless subject to write about! of course every one knows how to do that;" and I dare say they will feel greatly surprised when I tell them that, from much experience, I am inclined to believe that very few ladies know how to engage, in a business-like manner, the servants they employ. Before any steps are taken to inquire into character, a definite understanding should be come to, as to the exact terms of what the lawyers call "the contract" between the mistress and servant. On this careful and definite agreement, most of the future comfort of both depends. Nothing is more common than to hear a servant say, "I cannot do so-and-so, it is not my place;" or "I never undertook to do such a duty." Now, for all this a mistress has herself to blame, and every woman at the head of a household, whether large or small, should make herself thoroughly acquainted with the separate duties of each person in her house. Where the memory is treacherous, a list should be made out of the various points to be mentioned, viz.: wages—board—wages; allowances for beer, tea, sugar, &c.; dress, Sundays out, special duties, fare of servants, washing, visitors, holidays, Sunday dinners, hours of the house, special regulations.

Each lady can add to or take from this list, as she pleases, according to her own needs. The question of wages is, for most housewives, a difficult one. In the present day, wages, like everything, have advanced, and what are now asked for a "plain sober cook" are really exorbitant. I question very much if any more work be done for the high wages now paid than when they were more moderate, and the price now is far in excess of the real value of the article. The custom of giving servants board—wages has rapidly gained ground within the last few years. I myself consider it rather an incentive to dishonesty, as, unless a very strict watch be kept on the contents of the family larder, a great temptation is offered to a servant to pocket her board—wages, and help herself. It is advisable, however, to answer the question of the board—wages allowed while the family are away from home, when you engage a servant, as it saves discussion afterwards; and also to arrange the travelling expenses, if any must be allowed.

Many people at present object to give beer-money, or beer, and prefer to pay higher wages in lieu of it. I think it will be found a more satisfactory plan to dismiss the servants' beer-cask, as, unless you have very honest servants, it is liable to abuse. I believe the custom of allowing beer to servants in England has led to much drunkenness. Tea and sugar should always be allowed for, and a certain quantity, or sum of money for it, should be given out each week.

In very large houses the custom of perquisites can hardly be abolished. In fact, it forms a not incon siderable addition to the incomes of the servants; but a clear understanding should be come to, as to what are legitimate perquisites, and what are not. Where it is possible, however, I should make it a duty to abolish the custom, and give a higher wage on condition that nothing was sold out of the house. Where there are so many hard-working poor, to whom bones, vegetables, and grease would be acceptable, I think we are hardly justified in allowing them as perquisites. The washing is so completely a matter of special arrangement that I need not allude to it further.

The much-discussed question of followers and other visitors should be next settled. As regards the latter, a maid with a large family living near her, and many acquaintances, is a very unsatisfactory acquisition. I find the visitor question a most difficult one. Sunday evening is a favourite time for visiting, and if a young servant has a mother or sister near, it is a kindly action to give leave for them to come to tea occasionally. As regards followers, I invariably inquired, as kindly as possible, if my new maiden has a lover; and if there be really an engagement with a view to ultimate matrimony, I consider it my duty to recognise the fact, and allow such opportunity as may be possible for their seeing each other. This we ought all to do, as undoubtedly our domestic servants should have their chance to settle themselves in life. Many of my servants have married from my house into comfortable homes of their own, and I am anxious to lead them at all times into habits of saving and economy. A friend of mine, a man of very methodical habits, used to encourage his servants to put their earnings into the savings bank, by adding £1 to every £4 saved by them, and it is certainly a rare thing in the present day to find a woman who saves any portion of her wages without some such inducement. The passion for dress is so all-prevailing, from the highest to the lowest, that every penny goes in cheap finery, and no provision is laid by for sickness.

The usual rule for holidays, and for Sundays out, I find upon inquiry to be a monthly holiday, and Sunday evenings alternately with a fellow-servant. The monthly holiday can be arranged without much difficulty, by having a charwoman in for a few hours, and servants are usually anxious to help each other, in order that they may be helped again in their turn. The freedom of a whole afternoon out keeps a servant in good humour, I think; but in the case of a stranger I would inquire what friends she had to go to, as servants very often make undesirable friends, to whom they pay their visits, rather than stay at home and have it said they had no friends to go to. In this case there is a temptation to piffer from the house, in order to take something to make themselves welcome, if not a risk of their becoming the victims of the worst class, of even designing criminals.
The last few things on my list are all household arrangements, of which a mistress should give rather minute details, in order that the person desiring to enter her service may have as perfect an idea as possible of the habits and peculiarities of the household. If she accept the conditions offered to her, she cannot complain if a strict compliance be enforced.

A lady I knew some years ago, who was an excellent manager and mistress, had a very good method of keeping her servants’ wages-book; which, for the benefit of young housekeepers, I shall mention here. She entered after the name of each servant, the date of her coming, in what capacity, by whom recommended, the particulars of the character she had received with her, and the amount of wages she was to receive, and sometimes even the duties to be performed. Then followed the entries of wages paid, for as long as she remained. When she left, a short terse notice closed the page of her life in my friend’s service. In this notice were carefully enumerated her good qualities, as well as her faults, why she left, and what she could do best. One notice I remember well. It was “Good for nothing except cleaning lamps; at that she was a perfect genius, and we never had such comfort before. Had a passion for pickles.”

The ordinary way of proceeding, after an interview with the candidate for your service, is to inquire from her the whereabouts of her last place, and take the address for the purpose of inquiring into her character. From some mistresses it is extremely difficult to get a truthful character. They do not wish to injure the servant by saying what they know of her, and they are afraid to do so, for servants have been known to threaten their mistress with prosecution if she gave them a bad character. I believe you are not obliged to give a character, but in the case of a servant with whom I am dissatisfied, I give the character I received with her, if a letter, into her own hands before leaving me, and tell her frankly I have not been suited, so that she had better depend on the character with which she came to me, and not on any I could give her. A friend of mine told me, the other day, that she always made it a rule to inform a girl, on entering her service, that her character depended upon the way she behaved; for “When you leave,” my friend said, “I shall speak of you exactly as you are, both as to your faults and your good points.” This, I think, is really the most honest way. A servant then knows what she has to expect. I cannot too severely blame those ladies who take servants without characters. This state of things has been brought about, I know, by the false and utterly unreliable characters which have been given with worthless people. But any one so foolish as to receive a stranger unrecommended into her house, has only herself to blame for whatever may happen. I had one experience in my life, some years ago, which was a lesson I have never forgotten, on the subject of characters to servants; and as it may teach some other mistress, as I was taught, I shall tell the story. I had not long taken into my service a quiet-looking, rather timid young woman, as housemaid; her character from her last mistress was that she was “slow,” but “very sweet-tempered, and anxious to please.” She had been with me about a month, when one day a lady who had come to pay a morning visit saw her in the passage, as she was entering the house, and in the course of conversation asked me, with a very portentous face, “If I knew whom I had taken into my service?” I said, “Yes,” and gave a short account of where I had heard of my new maid, and with whom she had lived. “Ah!” said the lady, “that is all very well, but she left my service two years ago for stealing!” I felt quite horror-struck, but made no answer. I am a very slow thinker naturally, and I wanted time to take in the idea. “A thief”—that quiet, timid creature, with stag-like eyes—no! not for a moment could I believe the story. I would inquire into it, of course, but I could not believe it.

When my visitor had departed, a low tap at the drawing-room door was soon followed by the entrance of poor Jane with tearful face.

“What is it, Jane?” I asked gently.

“Oh, if you please, ma’am, I saw Mrs. Robinson come in, and I know she told you I was a thief. But indeed, indeed is it not true,” asservered poor Jane, with a burst of sob.

“I did not quite believe Mrs. Robinson’s story, Jane,” I said kindly. “You know Mrs. L— gave me a good character with you; and I should like to hear your story of your troubles with Mrs. Robinson, as I feel sure there is some mistake.”

And so, with many tears, Jane told me she had lived with Mrs. Robinson almost a year, when one day a brooch was missed, and as it could not be found when sought for, Mrs. Robinson had accused her of taking it. In vain she had opened her boxes, and asserted her innocence of the charge; though Mrs. Robinson had found nothing in them, she still declared Jane had stolen the brooch and made away with it out of the house. She dismissed her at once, and Jane went home to her mother’s, heart-broken. Fortunately, Mrs. L— had known her mother for many years, and had not required any character with her; and Jane had been with her until she went to America.

“Indeed I never saw it, I never took it, and mother would tell you I never gave it to her,” wept poor Jane, and I could not help believing the girl. So I said comfortably—

“Never mind now, Jane; that will do. I feel sure Mrs. Robinson was mistaken. Go back to your work, and don’t cry, nor think of it any more.”

“And may I stay with you, ma’am?” said Jane, looking up pitifully into my face.

“Yes, of course,” I answered, “and I will trust you as if I had never heard the story.”

It may be wondered at that I should have so dismissed so serious a charge; and I felt, when I came to consider the case, rather surprised at myself. But there was a feeling of something about the girl which
I could not put aside. Her distress was so real and so pitiful, her manner so meek and timid, that I could not believe her a thief; and I was right. I heard, some time afterwards, that Mrs. Robinson had found the brooch in a disused dress, and had cleared Jane's character. Jane lived with me until she married: an affectionate, tender-hearted servant; slow in her ways, undoubtedly, but faithful and willing.

PRACTICAL POINTS OF LAW.

By A LAWYER.

Wedlock.

Marriages must be celebrated between 8 A.M. and 3 P.M.

The consent of parents and guardians is not now essential for the validity of a marriage made by licence between minors. Infants under twenty-one years of age can legally enter into the marriage contract.

But no breach of promise action can be brought against an infant, although an infant can bring such an action against an adult. Thus if a man twenty-one years of age becomes engaged to a girl who is under that age, if she breaks off the engagement, he cannot bring an action for breach of promise against her, because she is not legally, although morally, bound by her contract.

But if he breaks faith with her an action will lie against him.

A person who marries a Ward of Court without the leave of the Court, whether such Ward be a boy or a girl, may be committed to prison for contempt of Court.

In marriage by banns care should be taken that the banns are published correctly; wilful mispublication of the banns may render the marriage void.

Non-residence in the parish will not affect the validity of the marriage after the ceremony has been performed.

A residence in the parish since yesterday is sufficient to entitle a person to give notice as a parishioner.

Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is illegal, except in Jersey, and then only between persons domiciled there.

When marrying a foreigner the greatest care must be exercised to make the union a valid one according to the laws of the country of the alien.

Otherwise the marriage may be valid in England and void abroad.

Inquiries, therefore, should be made at the Consulate of the foreigner, or of the Ambassador of his country.

Wedding presents, which are usually presented to the bride, become the separate property of the wife; and if her husband becomes bankrupt they cannot be claimed by his creditors.

All property belonging to a woman at the time of her marriage, or acquired by, or devolving upon her afterwards, can be disposed of by her as she pleases.

All money earned by the exercise of any literary, artistic, or scientific skill, or as wages, or otherwise, by the wife, belongs to her alone.

A wife's wearing apparel and ornaments, suitable to her rank, are called paraphernalia.

A widow is entitled to paraphernalia over and above her dower.

Pin-money is the wife's allowance for dress, and must be used for dress.

No account for arrears of pin-money can be carried beyond a year.

Therefore ladies should see that their pin-money is paid at the proper time.

When a man effects a policy of insurance on his life, which is expressed to be for the benefit of his wife, the insurance moneys will not be subject to his debts.

And the converse is good when the wife effects the insurance on her life for the benefit of her husband or of her children.

The savings of a married woman's separate estate become part of her separate estate.

Thus, when the furniture had been settled on the wife, and she, from time to time, renewed it with her own money, her husband's creditors were not allowed to attach it.

A married woman, with separate property of her own, may be compelled to maintain her husband, children, and grandchildren.

A woman, carrying on a trade separately from her husband, may be made a bankrupt.

A married woman is liable for a debt contracted before her marriage; the husband is only liable to the extent of property to which he has become entitled through his wife.

An infant widow is liable to pay for her deceased husband's funeral expenses.

If her husband dies intestate, i.e., without leaving a will, the wife takes one-third, or one-half of his personal estate, according to whether he leaves any children or not.

On the death of the husband, the mother becomes the guardian of the children, either alone or jointly with any guardian appointed by the father.