

Woman's Work.

BY LINA MOLLETT.

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III.—RULING AND SERVING.

PERHAPS at no time have women been such eager candidates for the servitude of government as to-day, and—in fairness be it added—at no time have a greater number been willing to serve the rough apprenticeship that alone can fit them for holding the reins of government. Matrons of Hospitals and Government Asylums and Head-mistresses of High-schools have never worked their way to the front more faithfully, have never more truly deserved the confidence of those they guide than at this present hour.

In a well-governed house, Hospital, school, ship, army or country, one of the most beautiful dispensations of justice is that each individual shares the honour of governing by his or her willing obedience to laws or rules, without bearing the burdens of responsibility that too often wears away the sword and cankers the soul of that servant of many—the conscientious ruler. He who holds the reins must often feel the yoke of government, and perhaps envy the comparative liberty of the governed. Not unfrequently, one hears a Matron actually regretting the days of active Probationership, when vexed questions of management were not for her to decide.

I once heard a puzzled political lion recall with serio-comic eloquence the time when a thrashing from his head-master set his mistakes right again, and wiped out the score against him.

Mistakes are so heavily punished, so severely commented upon, in those that govern. No doubt it is right. It must be so for the well-being of all. On those, however, who are actually deriving benefit from any self-chosen form of government some human sympathy with the trials of leadership reflects credit. Our laudable modern eagerness for improvement leads us to call public attention to mistakes in our various forms of civil and social government with valuable promptitude; but it is not, it seems to me, in the best taste for the student to under-rate the grandeur of his "Alma Mater," or for the recruit to scoff at his captain. Where outward respect quits company with loyalty—there the narrow boundary line that separates honourable service from slavishness has been overstepped.

Love of independence stamps our century! Good parlourmaids and cooks are as jewels in the desert, because, "dress-making," "shop-keeping," "clerkship," even "the stage," are con-

sidered to allow greater freedom to their followers. A dearth of housemaids, I am told, fell upon South Kensington soon after the arrival of Imry Kiralfy. The housemaids of South Kensington had emigrated to Venice, where, clothed in the delicate hues of field-flowers, they delighted our eyes with their graceful gambols. I do not vouch for the truth of this story; but repeat it as it was told to me.

Many of us have, however, been actual eye-witnesses of the recent procession of servant girls, with their pretty white caps, aprons, brooms, and pails. (It recalled the less striking, but at the time quite as interesting demonstration of washerwomen that is still fresh in our memories. The servant girls' demands for shorter hours and a weekly half-holiday may have seemed justified to many an amused spectator. If "Missus" agitates for a seat in Parliament, why shouldn't pretty Sarah Jane agitate for a seat in Hyde Park, with Joe or Bill for a companion, a waving canopy of green foliage overhead, and only one week (if the weather-gods are gracious) between her and a repetition of such blissful freedom from mop and duster? Let us congratulate Sarah Jane on her pluck, and breathe a silent prayer that she may not rashly exchange "service" for "slavery." One sometimes wonders how many smart housemaids who snubbed the page-boy and sniffed at cold mutton, have learned to shudder at a reeling step on the stair, and to pawn their clothes for bread. It is rather curious that to-day, when the freemasonry of work is preached with such liberality; when women do not shrink from engaging upon professional cookery, millinery, or dressmaking, because they happen to be able to refer to a long list of gentlemanly grandpapas; it is curious, I repeat, that at such a time we should be looking about with some anxiety for suitable recruits to do our household work, and lo! they are rare.

"No!" say (what we are pleased to call) the lower orders, "we prefer liberty: an evening out whenever we like. We have been taught to read and write and think. We will not be your menials. We will be your equals. We will be free!"

And lady housekeepers grumble at the difficulty of getting good servants, and abuse the Board School. "It is all the Board School's fault," say they, "for spoiling the girls and putting ideas into their heads." The Board School behaves like the moon when the aggressive little dog barked at it. *It rolls on its course.*

It is not by any means the least spirited or least promising girls who "go off to work on their own hook," as they call it. Many of them would make domestic treasures, but they

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