

white-faced girl, although she knows that even now a bedroom to herself and seven dinners a week would wipe out in six months most of the physical harm that has been done. At seventeen the girl usually becomes discontented, and longs for better clothes than the mother can afford, and is allowed to take a situation; but in nine cases out of ten she is now too old to settle down in service, even if for the first few months she can find an exceptionally light place. At home she has been permitted a licence as to hours, speech, manners, and dress that are beyond the endurance of the most modern and easy-going of mistresses, and in a short time she is at home again, with slightly-improved health, a little money, and a stock of clothes—many of which were probably given her on the understanding that she remained a year in her place. Inquire for the girl at eighteen or nineteen, and you will find either that she is hopelessly anæmic, or that the complete indiscipline of her home life has resulted in the loss of her character, or that this bloodless, undeveloped slip of a girl has married a workman—and this is undeniably a new phase in that class of life—ten, twelve, or even fifteen years her senior, who has long been accustomed to spend the whole of his wages on himself, and who will probably start housekeeping in a furnished lodging, one room and “use of the kitchen.”

The postponement of marriage among men thus affects these girls badly, both as sisters kept at home to be unpaid servants to them, and as possible wives. The only women who draw an apparent profit from it are the mothers of many of the men. The nurse must try and make them see that any profit made by “doing for” a son above twenty-five years of age is ill-gained, while to allow him to remain at home without making an adequate charge for board, lodging, and attendance is simply leaving him more money to spend on drink, gambling, and worse.

Some mothers honestly believe that they cannot part with a girl, although they own it would be for her personal advantage, because “she is so useful with the little ones”; but within a fortnight after sending her to service the mother invariably discovers; first, that the girl “made work” as well as did it; secondly, that the next in age has become distinctly less troublesome and more helpful; and thirdly, that all the remaining children are better for more air at night and more food by day.

The demand for servants who not only are, but call themselves, “temporary” is of very recent growth. Until a few years ago, in houses where two or three servants were kept, when the children came home for the holidays, when there were visitors staying for a week or so, or when there was illness, everyone in the home did a little more and expected a little less, or, at the utmost, a charwoman was engaged to do the rough work, and the rest was readjusted. Now, a “house-parlourmaid” is engaged.

She has all the usual caps and aprons, she knows her work; and there is little but her anæmic face to distinguish her from servants in regular employment. Until recently, people who only kept one servant did the work themselves when she was ill or had a holiday, or while they were waiting for her successor, aided perhaps by a charwoman twice a week; but they, too, must have the “temporary” now.

If ladies simply took advantage of the state of the market, and finding these poor foolish girls who like their “freedom” and just enough employment to supply fine clothes and ward off extreme ill-health, engaged them, one could not blame them so much; but, unhappily, I have found mistresses deliberately encouraging “superior” girls to adopt this method of life, even going to the mother and saying: “If you will keep Kate at home I will always take her when we have visitors, and, no doubt, she will get other work. I’ll recommend her, you know. And, of course, you will be glad to have her to help you a little with the children.”

Let such women realise what they are doing and give regular employment in their houses or none at all. I could point out scores of people who keep one, or even two, fewer servants than they would have done formerly, not for the sake of economy—that is the very last thing aimed at or secured—but because it is “less trouble” to put out all the sewing, even the mending, and all the washing; “less trouble” to buy tinned soup and tinned fruit and pastrycooks’ sweets; “less trouble” to engage an extra servant for a few weeks at a time than to keep a person in the house all the year round who is not absolutely needed unless much more work of this kind is done in the house.

Temporary servants may have their legitimate use here and there, but, as a race, they are kept up by the foolishness of the employed and the selfishness of the employer.

“Do you still engage Emily Hunt when you have visitors?” I asked a professional man’s wife.

“Oh, no; she was really *too* anæmic. Mr. — does not like delicate people, and she could not manage to stand all through dinner. I used to have to send her out of the room as soon as everyone was helped, and then ring for her again, and, of course, it was tiresome. Strange how little strength girls have nowadays! No; I have arranged with Mrs. Jenkins to let her daughter come when we want anyone. She was in regular service, but they would just as soon have her at home. I made the offer to Mrs. Jackson first. Louisa is such a very nice girl, but she said she must have a regular place for her, and I don’t want a second servant always in the house. I thought it most disobliging of her.” Mrs. Jackson, by the way, has an income of 16s. a week, and an intellect which, in a wider sphere, would be called commanding. The first girl named had almost reached the point of insanity through bloodlessness, and remains

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