

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,857.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1923.

Vol. LXXI

EDITORIAL.

THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON DOMESTIC SERVICE.

The Committee appointed to inquire into the conditions affecting the supply of female domestic servants has now issued its Report, and the question is one which is of great national importance, seeing that hygienic homes and well-cooked food are necessary for all classes, from the highest to the lowest, if the standard of health is to be maintained and raised.

It is frequently asserted that one of the reasons for the unpopularity of domestic service is that those who enter it lose caste, and while endorsing this view, the Committee state "maids who gave evidence, or wrote to us, invariably agreed that it is not so much the employers as their own friends and relatives who look down upon domestic service, and regard the domestic workers (especially those in private situations) with a mixture of pity and contempt."

This contempt has its origin, no doubt, in the snobbishness which relegates manual work to a lower level than clerical work; and yet, of two workers, a far higher capacity for organisation, method, and skill is necessary in the domestic worker than in one who sits in front of a typewriter and strikes the keys.

Take the daily routine of a kitchen, the management required to keep it spotlessly clean and orderly, the knowledge of food values, the skill which provides well-prepared food and serves it to time in an appetising manner. To achieve all this efficiently needs a high standard of intelligence, talent upon which training is superimposed, the eye and hand of an artist, and the administrative capacity and temperament to maintain order, and to keep the other members of the domestic staff happy and contented. Women who possess these qualities—and there are many thousands efficiently exercising them in kitchens throughout the country to-day—are worthy of all honour and respect.

The same applies to those whose constant care, and efficient service, keep the houses we

live in sweet, clean, and attractive. A knowledge of housecraft, method, orderliness and organisation underlies the charm of the homes we love so well.

The Committee, of which Mrs. E. M. Wood, formerly Secretary to the London War Pensions Committee, is Chairman, considers that the general public is not free from blame in the matter of despising domestic service, and relegating it to an unfair status. But is not this point of view demonstrated in the composition of the Committee itself? Although appointed to inquire into the conditions affecting the supply of female domestic service, not one of the class concerned was placed upon it, though, without doubt, valuable assistance could have been given by one who had learnt from practical experience where the shoe pinches, had the Committee had the advantage of her co-operation.

She might also have warned them that the domestic workers of the present day do not desire to be regarded as wax dolls, and be pampered and kept in glass cases, but rather to be permitted to develop and exercise the sturdy self-respect and independence which have been the backbone of the British nation.

It is difficult to understand why the Committee should think the present time opportune for extending unemployment insurance to domestic service, when the demand for such service is greater than the supply.

Recommending that provision be made for the efficient training of domestic workers, the Committee says:—

"The present conditions, which enable inefficiency, neglect of duty and bad service to obtain the same rewards as efficiency and good service, are demoralising for the workers, and intolerable for the employers. The only way to improve so unsatisfactory a condition of affairs is to render domestic work more attractive to the right type of girl, and to make it possible for her to obtain the preparation for her career which we consider absolutely essential, domestic service being, in our opinion, a highly skilled occupation, requiring good qualities both of character and mind."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)