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# EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD

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EDITORIAL

AUGUST 1917

## PUT YOURSELF IN HER PLACE

By ELIZABETH POLLARD

DO you think you can do it? Do you think you can put yourself in the servant's place? If you can, the result will be illuminating, and may go a long way toward solving a most difficult and vital problem. The "help" famine isn't lessening, and it is becoming quite serious, especially where there is sickness or babies in a home. Yet there are still plenty of girls in Canada. Why won't they do housework? In most cases, they are well fed, comfortably housed, kindly treated, and receive better pay than in many more favoured vocations. Yet housework is almost the last resort of the wage-earning girl. Why? Put yourself in her place, and perhaps you will understand.

How would you like this?

"How do you like your new maid?" is a question often asked, and nearly as often the answer is, "I think she'll do very well after I get her trained into my ways." In most occupations, a girl is taught her business according to some recognized standard, and treated accordingly. With housework, a girl may come with experience and good references, but the new mistress starts in to "make her over." This may go on from place to place, so long as she does housework for others. How would you like never to be done submitting to the whims and fancies of others?

How would you like that?

"Lucy, just help Bobby pop some corn; he's so restless."

"But I've only begun my dishes," objects Lucy.

"Never mind the dishes. They can wait. Attend to Bobby," is the order.

With Lucy it is a case of obey the mistress or have trouble.

"This is the eighteenth time by actual count that I've been interrupted at my work this morning," confides Lucy, as she stands in a bakeshop waiting for some biscuits demanded by Bobby at the noon meal.

By these thoughtless interruptions, the work that should be done during the day drags on into the night, lengthening the ten-hour day into perhaps sixteen hours, but, unlike other wage-earners, she gets no extra pay. How would you like that?

Can you imagine yourself in her place?

### The Social Life

You give Lucy a pleasant room (or is it a closet off or over the kitchen?); you provide a neat little table with a white cloth on it, that she may eat her meals like a Christian, which is kind and thoughtful. But if Lucy gets time to set the little table for herself, which she often does not, she sits at it alone. When the family meet in the dining-room, there is, or should be, pleasant chat and laughter, but Lucy eats her second-hand dinner in silence. Nobody speaks to her, unless she is wanted to do something.

How would you like that?

"But she is used to it!" you exclaim.

That doesn't mend the matter—for Lucy. It is said that eels get used to being skinned, and Irishmen to being hanged—but that doesn't mend the matter for the eels and the Irishmen. Lucy is young. In the parlour, the family has visitors, music, games, or dancing, in fact, a full measure of social life, all the pleasant recreation that is the heritage of youth. But Lucy has no part in this, except to do the extra work entertaining makes. She has no home or social life. The usual one evening and one afternoon off each week are wholly inadequate.

### Look This in the Face

Why these conditions? Why is Lucy so isolated? Because she is an inferior, a servant, holding a degraded position. This is the arrow that cuts the sharpest and deepest into her soul. You may protest against this imputation. You say you don't regard Lucy as degraded; in fact, you consider her quite a nice girl. But pause a moment. Look the matter squarely in the face. Wouldn't it be presumption in Lucy to enter or depart by the same door as the family? Would she dare be found sitting in the front part of the house? Not she! Lucy isn't fit to sit at the same table, or in the same room with any member of the family she serves, or to mingle

with them in any way. What has reduced a nice girl like Lucy to such a state of degradation as this? Housework! Then no wonder she wants to get away from it.

### The Country Girl's Dilemma

We've been uplifting and educating the masses until the result shows a lot of nice girls like Lucy. They are away above their position, because the position hasn't been raised to match the standard of the girls. The more intelligence developed in the girl, the greater becomes her self-respect, and the more keenly she feels the degradation of her position.

A young country girl was employed by a rich city lady. The girl had a brother clerking in the same city, who one day came to see her, and didn't know any better than to call at the front door. The maid who admitted him was misled by his respectable appearance, and showed him into the library, where he later met his sister. The mistress was outraged.

"A servant dared receive her visitor in my library! Which chair did he sit on?" she demanded.

"This one," pointed out the frightened maid.

"Take it to the attic. No guest or member of my family shall ever use it again."

How do you think that girl and her family felt? How would you like it? This was raw, but it actually happened. You say you never could have done it. Of course not. You're too kind-hearted and womanly to be guilty of such an act of ungracious, heartless snobbery. But you have probably done things that hurt quite as much, and the prejudice engendered, nursed, and perpetuated by class distinction, responsible for the disaster, is present with you, whether you are conscious of it or not.

### We All Serve

Yet service in itself isn't degrading. We all, each one of us, serve, or should serve, others. That is the excuse of our being. The business man serves his customers, the professional man his patrons, the law-maker his constituents; even the ruler of a nation serves the people. Then why is any service degrading?

This question brings us back to the position. Digging deep into the heart of the matter, the germ of the trouble is found to lie in the lack of efficiency. Degrees of honour or degradation depend on the kind of service given.

Years ago a nurse was a sort of servant, and treated as such. Note the standing of the nursing profession to-day. The advanced medical profession first, then the general intelligent public, began to realize the importance of efficient nursing. Gradually, character, intelligence, education, morality, and earnestness, requiring years of training, were demanded. The result is a profession that no woman feels above entering.

A nurse will have her picture taken in uniform, thereby showing that she is proud of her calling. The uniform of a maid is full prettier than that of a nurse; yet do you ever see a girl exhibiting her picture taken in it? Why? Because it is the insignia of her inferiority, the badge of her degradation. She is ashamed of her position. Would you?

### The Efficient Servant

Dignify the position. Realize the importance of efficiency in houseworkers, in their relation to home-making, which is the greatest, broadest, noblest, and most natural occupation of woman. When the girl comes to this task, bringing a full measure of efficiency, it will be considered no more undignified to relieve the over-burdened home-maker of a part of her work, than it would be to take over the care of the sick, or take dictation in an office, teach children in the home. In each case it simply means a fair exchange. The employer wants the employee's work, and the employee needs the employer's money.

Eliminate distasteful appellations—maid, servant, and domestic. These, as applied to house-workers, will carry a sting for many a year to come. We have shop girls, factory girls, office girls, and various other girl titles; then why not, "graduate house-girls?" Consider the meaning such a title would convey to the home-worker—one who thoroughly understands every kind of housework, including sewing, mending, and darning.

### Worth the Price

It may appear at a glance that the cost of producing these experts would come high. It wouldn't, if rightly managed. To increase the cost of help would mean placing it beyond the reach of people of moderate means, and it is these who are considered herein. Wealthy women can take care of themselves.

Observe the efficiency attained by nurses; yet a nurse can be self-supporting during the term of her training. The same could be done for the house-girl. A training school should be established in connection with a girls' home, an institution, or any well-managed, reliable place, where a lot of all kinds of housework must be done.

In training these girls, their whole lives should be considered. They would begin by being assistants to home-makers, but would eventually themselves become home-makers, requiring a broader training, which would increase their value as assistants. Simple home nursing, care of children, and the keeping of household accounts should be included in the course, which should attract a very desirable class of girl.

### The Efficient Employer

All girls, gentle or simple, should receive housewifely training. Not long ago there came near to being a mutiny in a certain convent, because the Mother Superior insisted on training in general housework. The girls held an indignation meeting, and sent up a delegation with the result.

"We're not here to be taught how to do housework. Rather than do the work of servants, we'll leave the convent," was the ultimatum.

"Very well," conceded the wise woman. "Tomorrow morning I shall arrange for a full attendance of all the pupils in the convent. When you are all present, I shall explain my reasons for taking this course; then any girl desiring to leave may notify her parents to that effect."

She explained that all girls were educated with the end in view that, eventually, they would become wives. Home-making, with all it implies, would follow. Assuming a girl marries a millionaire, household knowledge is desirable. She may have a housekeeper to manage her staff of servants, but if ignorant of housework, she has no means of knowing if either housekeeper or servant understands her business. She may know that her household machinery isn't running smoothly, but she can't put her finger on the weak spot.

Next comes the woman who can afford help, but must manage her own housekeeping. If she has never done housework herself, how is she to know how much a girl can reasonably be expected to do? This lack of experience is the cause of untold friction between mistress and maid. Some are too hard on a girl, while others are too easy, and consequently are imposed on.

### The Business Man and His Wife

Marriage is a partnership. Man's part is to earn and support, while the woman rears the children and makes the home. But note the difference in their methods and training. Whatever his business, the man and his assistants have received the same training. He has done the work, and knows what to expect. They can't fool him. He has his private office, but there is no social barrier between him and his help. The boy who sweeps the office may rise to be a member of the firm. How long would a firm last, if its head followed the methods of his wife in home-making?

Then there is the ever increasing number of women who must do their own housework. If a tithe of the efforts expended on gaining efficiency in other money-making professions were devoted to housework, the result would be incalculable happiness to home-makers. Delight in housework, and you will do it well. Do it well, and you will delight in it, and cease to regard it as "drudgery." It merges into that fascinating profession, home-making.

"I tried doing my own housework, by getting in a woman two days in the week to do washing and heavy work. After six months of it, I'm a perfect wreck," affirmed one incompetent home-maker, with a family of two.