

CONCERNING THE SERVANT GIRL.

BY ARNOLD GOSWORTHY.

Under a strong sense of duty I take my pen in hand to write these few lines in defence of that unhappy victim of tyranny and oppression, the servant girl. There never was anybody more hardily done by in the world. People are so ignorant and wicked now-a-days that they don't seem to appreciate the honour that is done them when a servant girl condescends to come and live with them, and grace their humble home with her illustrious presence. They are actually so unreasonable as to expect her to help in the housework, just because they happen to keep her in very ordinary board and lodging and give her a few paltry shillings a month. And when her day's business is over she is never asked to come upstairs and sit round the fire with the master and missis, or take a hand at whist with the family; and if there's a dinner-party in the house it's ten chances to one if she is taken into the drawing-room and introduced to anybody. Oh, it's shameful, that's what it is.

And then people are so abominably selfish. Because they happen to want breakfast about eight o'clock in the morning they must needs start a bell ringing right over a girl's head just as she has got into the middle of a lovely dream where she is the Princess of Wales and is going to marry the new policeman at the corner as soon as he can get trusted somewhere for the furniture. Of course, she doesn't move the first time the bells rings. No self-respecting girl would do that; and besides it's contrary to the etiquette of the profession. The thing is to wait until the brutes are tired of ringing, and then to go to sleep again, just to preserve one's independence. Even then, however, a poor girl will often be obliged, just for the sake of peace, to come downstairs at the unearthly hour of seven in the morning. Isn't it monstrous? Can you imagine anybody calling himself a *man* being mean enough to expect a girl to get up at that hour and prepare his breakfast just because he happens to pay her for doing it? I wonder it's allowed—I do really.

Common fairness in the treatment of the servant-girl is, of course, not to be expected. Oh, dear no! The missis can come down to breakfast in her dressing-gown right enough; but if the poor servant should happen to wait at table in her old flannel petticoat, the fuss they make about it is positively awful. And if she should keep the new bread for the kitchen, and serve up a day before-yesterday's loaf in the breakfast-room, they don't give her any credit for her thoughtfulness, but begin to speechify about it in a manner that is completely subversive of the traditional decencies of debate. And the little things they find fault with—it's something dreadful! Some people will even object if they find a dirty thumb-mark on the bread-and-butter—as if a girl could clean the stove and get breakfast at the same time without a trifling slip now and then. Why, I have known people to get quite uppish just because they happened to find a hairpin in the teapot. Isn't it fearful?

Everybody knows what an appalling amount of suffering is inflicted on the poor servant-girl by the cat. I don't mean the cat-o'-nine-tails, but the cat-o'-nine-lives, that no family should be without. If that misguided brute should happen to make a little too free with the biscuits and sherry, the servant-girl gets the blame of it. It is quite a common thing for a cat to take the kitchen coal scuttle round to the pawnbroker's till the end of the month; but when anything of that kind happens the servant-girl is accused of it directly. Oh, of course! Sometimes a cat, in the diminution of its moral vigour, will make off with a couple of silver spoons. And just because they happen to find those spoons wrapped up in an old stocking in the servant-girl's box, they declare she wanted to steal them, in spite of the fact that she can prove beyond dispute that she comes of a most respectable family, and that her father knew some one who was related to a man who used to go round with the plate at prayer meetings. Isn't it abominable?

If a girl tries to do the people of the house a good turn, she

never gets the credit of it. One day she grieves to think of that beautiful spring bonnet lying idle upstairs, and in the goodness of her heart she takes it out for an airing to freshen it up a bit. And then, just because she doesn't happen to use the same kind of hair oil as the missis, there's quite a scene. They talk as if she wanted to wear the horrid old thing for her own pleasure. The idea! Then, again, she is naturally concerned about the master's appearance, out of pure personal regard for his welfare, perhaps, she'll take a few of his last new collars, that really don't suit him at all, and give them to the soldier who comes in to sing hymns with her on Sunday evenings. But do you think she gets any thanks for her kindness? Not a bit of it! The way they treat the servant-girl now-a-days is simply preposterous. There'll be a question asked in the House of Commons about it soon, you'll see!

MAY-DAY.

[We have some doubt as to the circumstances under which our contributor must have written this article. We will let it pass this time. Ed.]

By a judicious use of obsolete magazines, such as say *Household Words* twenty years after date (a long term that,) there could no doubt be compiled a long and possibly interesting account of May-Day, and of the many curious customs once extant that have now pass into the nevermore. Plagiarism, annexing or cribbing (a rose by any other, etc.) is at all times most reprehensible, especially in Literature (with a big L.) It, however, cannot be satisfactorily practised in the present instance, on account of want of material, although the spirit, like Barkiss, is willin'.

"No matter-r-r-r," as Tyrone Power used to say with that inimitable deep chest roll of his. May-Day was observed right royally in England in the old days before them (*before them!*—how the deuce did those words creep in? they've no right there. But the long faced sanctimonious Puritans nearly killed it. When most of them had emigrated, however and the remainder had grown tired of their super-holiness, then did May-Day "bob up serenely" again: though shorn of much of its splendour. At the present time May-Day is still observed in many out of the way villages in England, peaceful communities far from the busy haunts of men, where rustic simplicity still pursues the even tenor of its whey. It is in the midlands principally that this is kept up, within a day's march of the Black Country. There there are hamlets in which the May-Pole (resembling nothing so much as an undersized telephone post without the cross-bars) still stands and stands still in the centre of the village green. With the Maying there is assimilated, in certain districts another *divertissement*, the origin of which is equally unknown, but frequently said to be pagan. Pagan is such a satisfying and comfortable word to use you know, it as it were "terminates or pulls up short," as Adam Smith might say, an investigation that might otherwise prove disastrous. This custom is known as "well dressing," nothing to do with "dressing well." The principal well or spring of the village is enclosed in a bower of flowers that bloom in the spring, and with the may-pole shares the honours of the day. There is a Queen of the May of course, and equally of course many a black black eye, especially in the neighborhood of the village pub, about closing time.

The day starts decorously enough, with service in the village church. Things progress in a fairly respectable manner during the afternoon, but the evening—well "a sup o' ale does no man no harm, beyant makin' him just a bit feekless." The custom is so English you know—attend church in the morning, do a little law-making in the afternoon, get howling drunk at night. The man who can't get drunk for a shilling in England, on country brewer's beer, is worthy of a stand in a dime museum.

For a stranger who attends a function of this kind every one has open house, the inhabitants vie with one another in showing hospitality (that's the way it's usually expressed, isn't it?) unto them. One drives home with a very confused notion of plough-boys in their best black, dairy maids in white, beer in barrels, with dancing and kiss in the ring in unlimited quantities.