

# THE ANTIDOTE

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## KEYS.

Everybody must have remarked the extraordinary multiplying powers belonging to keys. There is a gloom about them. In vain do you from time to time make a minute inspection and go over your key-rings and key-boxes, but before long you are wondering to what lock to ascribe this particular, unexplained tramp of a key,—how in the world you came into possession of this would-be ornamental implement with a four cornered head; which can certainly open nothing you are aware of possessing and what you can possibly want with this clumsy kitchen-door affair, looking as if its wards had been made by a process of gnawing and biting—*is something that engages your attention for days upon days.*

There they are: keys and keys, mysterious, unsuggestive! You can find no key-holes for them, and you dare not throw them away, since surely their key-holes must be waiting them somewhere in your keeping. For a while you go on letting them dangle on your key-ring or chain in hopes of some sudden flash of memory or stroke of chance revealing their key-holes to you, but the revelation never comes, and at last you take them off and consign them (if you are of a prudent and packing away turn of mind) to the company of their unavailing brethren, in a limbo of the lockless. They will never come out, and more keys will be added to them.

But the mischief of it is that keys do not content themselves with this supernatural multiplying: they also disappear like merely mortal things,—like wineglasses, teacups, pins and buttons. If it were only the having so many keys with no locks, we might accept the phenomenon with meek wonder, as we wonder at there being so many more stars in the sky than we

require for navigating purposes, and so many flowers wasting their sweetness on the desert air: but then we have so many locks without keys. From our wardrobes, our drawers, our doors, our cabinets, our secretaires, and all the various receptacles to which the furniture may refuse handles, the keys drop away like autumn leaves, and, apparently like autumn leaves, wither and pass into dust. But the unexpected keys never fit the deserted locks, and that seems a mystery of evil. It is peculiarly disturbing when, on your returning from your holiday-trip, you have found in your key-box half a dozen keys, whose "raison d'être" is an insoluble problem, to have to send for the locksmith to replace half-a-dozen other keys which have melted out of their locks, no one knows when or how. As a rule, unexpected keys are small, and deserted locks are large. It would seem almost as if vexatious fairies make changelings of keys as they used to do in olden times, of babies, and there is no other theory which can connect those keys with those locks!

The troubles of life assume different aspects to different sufferers: to some the disease, to others, the doctor is the greater trial; to some the dinner of herbs, to others the stalled ox is the mortification; to some the frying-pan, to others the fire is the less objectionable martyrdom; so it is with locks and keys. There are persons, perhaps a majority—for such persons must be unthinking, and the unthinking are a majority—there are persons who hold it a lighter affliction to possess keys without locks than locks without keys. Looking only to the moment, they note the inconvenience of finding their properties secured from their access, perhaps just when they most need them for immediate purposes; and since no like obstruction can ever arise from the possession of aimless keys, which, if they can unfasten nothing, at least fasten up nothing, they take it that the momentary, the removable difficulty—that of the lock whose key has gone into the past—represents the immeasurably greater loss.

This is an evident mistake. The locksmith arrives, forces the lock, puts it back with another key, and all is as

before. The loss is definite; the key some time, more temper, and your expenses. In the other case the loss is indefinite, never at an end. You have forgotten or failed to learn what that key could have unlocked for you; it remains a monument of vanished possibilities, whose chief though unknown disappointments of life; it is the visible but untelligible record of something you ought to have and have not. You can never tell now, you can only guess, what it might have done if you had discovered its use, and it has become worse than useless, for it is aggravating. What endowment can be more annoying than a possession which its owner is hopelessly precluded from enjoying?

## MARK YOUR BIRD.

While young women know, and their parents know for them, that marriage is not merely the happiest and fittest condition to which they can look forward, but the only happy and fit condition—the only escape from dependence on charity or on their own incompetencies and loss of social position, and from all the hardships and hazards of an unskilled and precarious existence—it seems unreasonable that neither the young women nor their parents are able to take active measures to prevent the catastrophe of final spinsterhood. But the instinct which is at the bottom of the prohibition is one too sound to be gainsaid. Marriage should mean love, and love has its own laws and cannot be transacted according to the principles of demand and supply, nor through the medium of parents or any other accredited agents.

That a young woman will have no place in the world unless a husband gives her a home and a purpose in life, is no doubt a strong temptation to marriage, but it is not a reason for it. There is only one allowable reason, and that is love for the man she marries, and whether it be so or not, or only by the training of generations, young women, unless most exceptionally, do not love unsought.

They may of course be deceived as to the seeking, or as to the extent and earnestness of the seeking, but that is