

# THE ANTIDOTE

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## DOMESTIC SERVICE.

The standard of domestic service has been gradually lowering for years past. The tendency towards the system of having girls taught at home under governesses instead of sending them to schools, and the spread downwards of that superficial tincturing of accomplishments and foreign phraseology accepted as feminine education, combined with the pushing-upwards tendency which is at once the strength and folly of our day, have had the result of entirely removing from the servant class the large number of those who, with something of tradition, and some of the liberal sentiments developed by higher education than the house-maid's became capable servants instead of, as now, incapable governesses. Those, both by their higher social antecedents and connections, and by their higher personal level, did much in a former generation to raise the standard of the whole class of women servants, and their influence could not but tend to keep the moral tone of service higher than when, as now, it is wholly set by untaught persons from the lowest classes whose main idea of honor is assumption. If "lady helps" were what the name betokens, and that in both its parts, their appearance in the servant sphere would be of high value for its redemption—as it would have been higher still, if being ladies and thinking it no shame to perform the task of ser-

vants, they had thought it also no shame to take the honest name of servant: but the last thing to be wished for by those who, for the sake of servants and employers alike, would have domestic service justly valued as honorable, is the disguising servant under any pretentious non-servant name. It is because servants are ashamed of service that they are making the name of servant discreditable while any show of thinking it charitable and complimentary to shirk the word "servant" as if it were opprobrious, and to euphonize it into "gentlemen help" or "lady help" or "ministering angel," or any other pretty way of calling a servant not a servant, is to avow that to be a servant is to commit a baseness which asks for some kind of concealment. If we cannot call men and women servants with any other feelings than as we call them blacksmiths or dressmakers or green-grocers, there must be something wrong, either in the condition of servant or in our appreciation of it. And clearly, unless we hit upon some expedient for abolishing domestic service altogether, what we have to aim at is, that not only the condition of servant, but our appreciation of it, and still more, the servants' appreciation of it, should have in it nothing that can abase an honorable man or woman in that condition.

The abolition of domestic service, if it were possible, is by no means to be wished for in the interest of those from whom the servants come. The arts of housewifery are notoriously not intuitive among our English speaking people, and if the wives and daughters of working-men had no other example of culinary care and cleanliness, and the refinements of orderly domestic habits than they would create themselves, there would inevitably be a falling back in these matters. As it is, there is usually, from their want of skill and want of management and want of zeal as cooks, caterers and cleaners, far too little comfort in their homes for the expenditure; but so long as an appreciable percentage among them receives something of a practical education in domestic duties, and have opportunities of forming a higher ideal of cleanliness and fitness and prettiness in dom-

estic surroundings than that suggested by the arrangements of slatternly neighbors, there is something to leaven the general incapacity, and good traditions must exist. Even where the mother is herself competent, there are very few working-class homes in which the daughters can be effectually trained in the household skills of which they ought to be past-mistresses when they come to the management of homes of their own. The notable mother has no time to spare and finds it quicker work to do things herself than to entrust them to bungling and very unwilling beginners from the neighboring counties. She cannot afford the damage of their breakages and their blunders, and she has not the patience to see the things she would have done well herself disgrace her housekeeping if done by others. It is not uncommon even, to find the daughters of practically active and efficient housewives more indolent and inefficient in housewifery than those of the gossips and the slatterns and the helpless creatures who are daily in a feeble and promiscuous way "cleaning up" after yesterday and making dirt for to-morrow; the incapable women, for their own sakes, make their girls do something, though they may not be wholesomely exacting as to how it is done; the capable women are apt to think only of how the work will prosper best and to do it well themselves.

There is scarcely any form of self-control more difficult to practice than that of seeing another incompetently performing, in obedience to your own command, a task which you can achieve better yourself; to leave your pupil or your servant what it is his part to do and yours only to direct, but what you can do and he cannot, is one of the most difficult phases of teaching and ruling, one to some natures well nigh impossible. It is at all events, a power not as a matter of course possessed by all educated persons, nor even by all educated persons who recognize its importance, and it must be one of more difficult acquirement by women than by men; it is certainly not a power likely to be common among hard-worked women barely able to read and write, and with no leisure for considering moral pro-