The Girl in Domestic Service

By Estelle Jenkins

We often hear people ask why it is that girls and women who have to work for a living, and who are often possessed of considerable ability in Domestic Economics, are inclined to shun domestic service, and why they will often be out of work, destitute even, or accept situations in industrial lines that are very poorly paid with no opportunity for advancement, when there is such a splendid field in all branches of domestic service. There always is two sides to every question, but, I believe that this is one of the most discouraging problems that the working girl as well as the woman who employes one or more maids in her home, has to contend with — the question on the part of the working girl of securing a suitable situation, and the question on the part of the housewife of obtaining the services of a good competent maid. I really have found many

they have been successful in solving the "servant problem" with entire satisfaction to themselves and those whom they employ. Their maids remain with them indefinately, and really become much attached to them and are sorry to leave them. I talked with a maid from such a home a short time since and she explained that while the lady in whose home she was employed, insisted upon systematic and efficient work on her part, that she, also, conceded rights to her maid and then respected them. She recognized the necessity of providing the elements of a normal standard of living, a comfortable, sanitary room, some appertunity for self-improvement with a clean, moral environment, often showing a ready sympathy and understanding in training the maids in her own peculiar ways and system. But these are the fortunate ones who have solved their problem upon an efficient basis, so they need no further discussion here. because this really is to represent the other side of the story.

One reason that the intelligent, depen-

-dable girl shuns domestic ser-
-vice is because of the unjust
social ostracism and the abased
and servile attitude that she is
so often expected to assume so
that the Mistress of the house will
not feel that she wishes to be
set upon a pedestal, sit at table
with the family, use the parlor and
the automobile, borrow Madam's
wardrobe, filch the silver, presume
upon Madam's position and authority
in the home etc. I read an adv-
-ertisement in a local morning
paper several years ago which
sarcastically stated that all
the above privileges would be
granted to any domestic worker
who would condescend to come
and perform some light household
duties for this paragon of brilliant
ideas. I felt very indignant when
I read it and reflected then that no
girl or woman possessing proper
self-respect or efficiency, would
wish employment in such a home.

A cold, damp unsanitary room in a basement is not good enough for a human being. A cold cheerless attic room is not good enough for a tired, overheated working girl to rest in. In the summer such a room adds even greater discomfort to the hapless state. I was very much impressed by an article in a western newspaper, recently, telling of how one young woman had engaged herself to work in a certain household where the family was prominent in social circles and very wealthy. She appears to have had a sad experience, and so she wrote a tract, setting forth some of the unpleasant conditions that were imposed upon her. This young woman attended a women's club one evening and told her story, and was promptly discredited. But, nevertheless, many very reliable and capable girls whose honor is above impeachment, are relating just such experiences every day before the employment

Bureaus, Industrial Organizations and Fraternal Orders where they appeal for help in securing situations.

I sat one morning in the Employment Dept. of a Y. W. C. A. and listened to the conversations of women and girls seeking employment and noted carefully the kind of propositions ladies who were seeking competent maids had to offer. One lady explained quite at length and with the self-asserting manner of an Autocrat the qualifications the maid she was seeking must possess. She assigned a duty for every hour in the day, which meant that the maid must be efficient as lady's maid, parlor maid, nurse girl, second girl, cook and laundress, then she complacently offered 5.00 per week wages and ended by saying — "It is a very easy place for any girl who has the least ambition and efficiency." After she had gone the patient and conscientious Secretary explained: "We have so many calls like that and they get so impatient because we cannot fill their orders. Why, if a girl or woman is as efficient as that lady demands, she is worth more money and a better situation, and she invariably commands both."

Marion was intelligent and quite interested in Domestic Economics and had always aspired to become an efficient homemaker and a good Cook. She received an invitation to attend a banquet, given in honor of the Alumni of a College, which was to be prepared and served by the Domestic Science Dept. of the School, under the supervision of the New Instructor, who had just graduated with honors from a well known Institute of Science and this was to be her first effort, and was designed to set forth the desirable advantages of a thorough training in Domestic Science.

Marion became very enthusiastic, as she admired the perfectly laid tables, the artistic decorations, the efficient service of the well trained girls, who, dressed in neat black dresses with dainty white collars and cuffs and neat white aprons, looked very attractive indeed, but she especially noted the capable supervision of everything, by the head of the Dept. and decided that there

really was responsibility, dig-
-nity even; in being a capable house-
-keeper. She resolved that if ever
the time came that she was comp-
-elled to work out for a living, that
she would go into domestic service.

The time did come, when she was
not only compelled to work for her own
living, but she was a widow with
little ones dependent upon her. She
wrote to two Schools of Domestic Science
and secured lectures, lessons and
receipts, and after careful study of
them, she secured her first situation,
and then proceeded to put the lessons
into practice. She was called capa-
-ble and intelligent by her employers.
Every evening was devoted to study,
in her room, preparing notes upon
her progress, and outlining her work
for the following day. But gradually
every kind of responsibility, and extra
services at all hours of the day or
evening were required of her.
She felt under obligations to comply

as she needed the money that this place paid. But, finally, her health broke, and she was compelled to give up her situation, and was ill for several weeks. Later, she felt that she would try again. This was a beautiful new home, for the Elliott Haines were very prominent in business and social circles — there were five children, the house was large, and so of course, it would require a very large amount of work to keep it in order. There was the usual interview between Madam and the prospective new maid. Marion was informed that her duties would be entirely down stairs, principally to attend to the cooking and serving of meals, the care of the kitchen, pantries, bath rooms and basement, which must be kept clean. Then to thoroughly sweep and clean the dining room, living room and parlors once a week, and wash the porches. Mrs. Haines felt that these few simple duties should not overtax any woman, "and" she had said, "we are not exten-

-taining more, but in case we should, of course, we will engage extra help. And You may have every thursday and Sunday afternoon."

Marion agreed to undertake it, and as the house was modern, she felt that she really would take a great deal of pride in her work. As is so often the case, the pantries and hardwood floors had been badly neglected, and so these received immediate attention. Marion was complimented upon results, and was told that no other maid had done these things for them. Next she planned a system by which she could perform each duty in a given time and in an efficient way, and still have a little time reserved each afternoon for personal care and cleanliness and a short resting period. She was told that other maids had been in the habit of working around all day. Marion turned her attention, especially, to the cooking and proper serving of meals, but now, they began to entertain

quite frequently. Mrs. Haines did not think that it was incumbent upon her to keep her part of the agreement and secure extra helps. Sometimes there were from twelve to eighteen people at table, and meals, of course, must be properly served. Mrs. Haines Magnanimously permitted the maid to serve the meal very simply— There was only a soup course with something for an entree, the meat course which included vegetables served from the side-table, a desert, and then tea, Caffee. But, you see, this was not considered as entertaining for the company consisted only of family friends and relatives. It had been agreed that Marion was to have every Sunday afternoon and evening "off" but usually by 5 o'clock she was just struggling through with the great stack of dishes and cooking utensels, and after this, she must bathe and dress before she could get away. Then the children began to be troublesome. Marion often felt lonely and yearned for someone with whom she could speak occasionally and exchange ideas upon topics of Mutual intrest. She made the very serious

mistake of venturing to speak pleas-
-antly to Madam one morning, and was
promptly reminded of her "place" and
servile position, by a cold
angry stare which demanded as plain-
-ly as words, to know how a mere
servant would dare to so presume!
The only time that this very "superior
lady" would condescend to speak to
Marion, was when she gave orders, or
related how she had been tried beyond
endurance by incompetent help, telling
how Sarah had stolen things, Madge
had been utterly impassable while
Jane was an undesirable character.
Marion had felt that the short
resting period in the afternoon
should be her own, so after taking
a quick bath and changing for
a clean dress in which to serve dinner,

She would go out and walk for about 20 or 30 minutes in the open air. She always felt rested and invigorated, and was able to prepare and serve dinner more efficiently when she did this, but the Mistress maintained the old prejudiced idea of subjugating the maid, and so let her understand that she was taking too much liberty for her position. That last Sunday there were 16 people to be served at dinner, which was to be an hour later than usual; it had been a very hard day and the maid was exausted, but was just finishing the unusually large stack of dishes, when Mrs. Haines walked officiously into the kitchen and told her that on account of its having been Stormy the day before the laundress had not been able to hang out the clothes so they had been left in cold water in the tubs. "And" She had said, "When you have finished those dishes

I want you to go down to the laundry and rinse and hang them out, and put the others to soak, so that the woman won't have to lose any time in the morning when she comes to wash." It was the last straw, and so Marion left her "splendid" situation in domestic service, which paid her the "liberal" wage of 5^{oo} per week. She could not afford to be out of work, so she secured a situation in another home. She explained to Mrs. Harmon that she had left her last place because she was not satisfied, and when asked for the address she gave it. Mrs. Harmon then called Mrs. Haines. Upon the future and they discussed Marion quite confidentially at length. Mrs. Haines, and because Marion had left her, told Mrs. Harmon that she wasn't any good anyway, and this, knowing that food and clothing for her little children depended upon her work, and their well-being upon her reputation. When Marion learned of this she was

deeply hurt so she left the new situation at once, vowing to renounce all "aspirations" in that direction, hoping that she might never be tempted by want to try again, so she turned her attention to making herself efficient in business. She says that while there are exacting demands upon a woman's energy and ability in the business world, still, she is permitted to maintain her own personal dignity — is not ostracized in a social way, can select her own environment and can at least furnish her home with that element of comfort, good taste and independence which is so essential to self-respect. It is because the foregoing experiences, encountered by those who would follow domestic service as a vocation, are so frequent, that it tends to discourage and disorganize those who would otherwise do their best at housework. If the house Madame could only be an efficient housekeeper and wise manager, and would place her household upon a business and systematic

basis, endowing it with some degree of re-
-sponsibility and dignity for the maid, this
problem of the "Servant" and the "Mistress"
would be solved, for I firmly believe, after
careful observation, as well as research, that
much dissatisfaction and discord between the man
who employs domestic help and the maid who
goes out to domestic service is often occasioned
because of the conscious inability on the part of
the lady herself, to govern intelligently upon
and efficient basis, the affairs of her household,
and so she seeks relief in the determination to
oppress, and decree, by virtue of her superior
social and financial position, [illegible]
by the intelligent efficiency of the man who
married her. This attitude on the part of the
"Mistress" reacts upon the maid, bringing to the
surface all her worst qualities, and corrupting her
otherwise good nature with resentment and scorn.