

OUR FEMALE SERVANTS.

Philosophical Observations of One Having Experience—From the German of Dr. Ernst Eckstein.

[Translated for the St. Paul Globe.] When Kossak, that spirited portrayer of customs some thirty years since pictured the Berlin servant girl, he gave as a ruling motive, the fear that the type of this wonderful production would vanish in a few lustres from the household chronicles on account of the continued influx of provincials. In the meantime experience has taught us that the amiable author saw too darkly. No social grade of the influx from the provinces takes on the peculiarities so quickly as that of the female servant; it would seem that the theory of his great center lies in the air with all its variations.

Is it not an actuality to-day as then? When Kossak maintained: "There dwells not the slightest doubt in the mind of the Berlin servant girl that the household, as the shell for the oyster—was ordained for her—and her character, which sometimes surprises with its gentleness and flattery, often frightens by a fearful outbreak of her uncontrolled nature, conforms to this belief. No Berlin servant girl is without her history; but the annals of her servant's book give very meager details concerning the most important events. The misfortune of the times is that, as in the works of Tacitus, the most important chapters have been lost. * * * In the life of our heroine the cousin plays a very important role. And we warn our readers not to understand this title in the sense of an exact relationship. * * * The evil of diplomatic secrecy in most cases surrounds this cousin. An infinite number of tokens proves his existence, but his personality is almost always concealed. His existence is chiefly discoverable as was that of the god Bel at Babel, through the vanished provisions. The enormously increasing consumption of fresh bread, the evaporation of wine and punch, the disquieting shrinkage of winter fruit, are reliable signs of the presence of a household. Should his worship not be opposed, this powerful being so closely connected with the family, little by little allows himself to become visible to the eyes of the mortals of the house. The frightened mistress in an unexpected moment encounters a dumb mass of humanity in some rear passage, or the master, chancing to open the door, finds a frightened young fellow asking for Mr. Smith. And they must content themselves with the explanation "my cousin" as answer to their inquiries. All this is as true to-day as it was then; yet, and it is not even exclusively characteristic of the Berlin servant; the type, instead of having been extinguished by a baser element, has rapidly developed, and conquered a wide circle of provincial cities. In daring to attempt in the following lines a short characterization of our female servants we are not in position to shelter ourselves under the plea of an historical ethnographical necessity, upon which Ernst K. has with jesting grace laid so much stress. However, we are herein fully justified by the natural desire of every mortal to study more accurately those beings upon whom he is most dependent, and of becoming more intimately acquainted with their peculiarities. Our servants are the real Penates and Lares, no divinities of first rank but most significant Principles which always imprint the mark of their sway upon domestic concerns.

It lies in the nature of the relation that the individual type of this household mythologic fix its boundaries less sharply and dovetails itself less firmly into the frame of a logically organized system than the figures of the Greek-Roman gods. Our treatment, therefore, will bear much more the character of aphoristic, gushing improvisation. The inevitable lot of all who conquer new territory for scientific contemplation is incompleteness. Let us begin with the cook, this most important factor of our female domestics. The cooks separate themselves naturally into two categories: into such as can cook and into such as cannot. The last named category comprises the vast majority of the unfortunates in contradistinction to the first, to term itself "cook" merely while the first with lofty self-consciousness distinguishes itself as "perfect cook."

The normal cook, viz: the cook who cannot cook replaces this want by a praiseworthy moral courage. When she has, for the first time left her country home and presents herself at the intelligence bureau, she has not the clear consciousness of the central prerogative. She candidly informs the person who furnishes servants that this or that is perfectly unknown to her, that up to this hour she has only made coffee, washed plates or peeled potatoes. The worthy woman, however, whose duty it is to provide the city public with domestics, comforts and encourages her. "Nonsense, that will come all right," see, I have here three good addresses, go there quite contentedly and you will be able to understand very well ordinary cooking, and then buy at the nearest shop a good cook-book, you need nothing more. At every meal ask as a matter of form only: "How are you accustomed, madam, to have this or that?" and notice closely the reply. The thankful girl, speechless from astonishment, presses the hand of her motherly friend and discovers immediately an incorrect self-respect.

She had imagined cooking to be much more difficult, and she rejoices royally that the crown of achievement glitters before her without any novitiate. Proud in her security she enters upon her quest and returns in the evening joyfully to the world-experienced dame with her silver dollar, who in turn puts the dollar in her pocket as the proper compensation for her trouble, advice and admonitions. The dame, by the way, has no particular wish that the young cook shall be fortunate in her first service, for the more changing the more dollars.

there is to be food at all there is no alternative for the mistress but to give instruction above to the presumptive cook, whose mind resembles an unwritten page. Should the girl possess a talent for cookery, and comprehend readily, it may happen that many mistresses may feel reconciled with past misconceptions. The first successful roast prepared entirely by the cook, fragrant and adorning the table, fills her with an exultant feeling of that excusable pride which makes a result of our personal efforts seem so precious. In the meantime only too easily, those same chords ring in the soul of the cook which vibrate in the bosom of the householder. The latter, it is known, sometimes takes occasion to increase the rent for the very reason that his tenant with great trouble and expense has known how to arrange his dwelling in a pleasant and comfortable manner. For, thinks the landlord, the dwelling which is now so lovely as a matter of course must be paid for more than the former ugly and tasteless affair. Thus the cook after her teaching becomes conscious of her own increased worth, and the mistress can thank her good fortune if the girl only demands increased wages. As a rule the ambition of the well educated cook follows a highlighting level, and as thanks for the instruction she has enjoyed, she gives warning and advertises herself as a perfect cook where a reader and more paying mistress is to be had.

The perfect cook distinguishes herself from the other category out of which she has developed according to nature, among other things, in making increased demand upon her employer's purse, for discreet treatment and the recognition of her authority. The perfect cook "takes no words"—with the obstinacy of a father in the church she holds fast (notwithstanding the outspoken wishes of her employer) to the contrary to that which she has in the course of her experience come to regard as a dogma. The housewife may explain to her ten times that the master does not like sugar on green beans. The perfect cook knows better; it stands written on her soul that sugar belongs on green beans; it is her inalienable right to put it there and only a forcible interference of a higher power can hinder her in the exercise of this right. Yes, it is better that she will muddle in at the last moment the forbidden ingredient should the mistress turn her back. If she has once won the conviction that it suits the customs of a perfect cook to envelope the patridges in smoked bacon preparatory to roasting, no weight of argument can compel her to use unsmoked. Should she cook Belgian cabages with bouillon, every other method of preparing them is a gastronomic barbarism. And if the mistress in modest guise suggests that an old adage runs *de gustibus*, * * * she shrugs her shoulders and mutters something, usually a phrase in the turning of which runs, "never in my life," and shows during the remainder of the day in a slight ironical behavior. Any reprimanding pretensions on the part of the mistress on account of any spoiled dish, the perfect cook will absolutely not endure; and it is a remarkable fact that the disapproving criticism of the master always tends to fall at the very moment when the cook least deserves them. Should her master find the soup unsalted, he can reckon with certainty that exactly this time she has put in an unusually large quantity of salt. She cannot understand or account for the pretended freshness, and moreover she tasted the soup before serving and found it savory. If the roast is too pale, she has had the greatest anxiety on this occasion lest it should be too brown. In a sauce too peppery, she has put the least possible quantity, not nearly as much as the cooking receipt demands. The gentleman must have eaten something which has disagreed with him; perhaps the wine was too sweet. In no case can she deserve criticism or reproach, for the term "perfect cook" is so taken literally in her case, absolute perfection and infallibility are essential factors of her comprehensibility. Should the perfect feature occur in a meal which no denial can cover, as for instance, the roasting burned to a coal, a soup in like manner permeated with smoke so that only a starving person could eat it, a chicken so flavored with gall that no excuse can help; then there has been a constellation of opposing circumstances, an evil fate, which has maliciously crossed the endeavors of the perfect cook. The bell has rung so often, the waiting maids were out, the master answered, or the hateful cat winds round the smoke down the chimney; or the mistress has expressly wished this or that so made and not otherwise, or the fire, or the wind, anywhere except in the single, faultless one among all these fallible things, in the ever perfect cook.

Not alone as preparator of food, not alone as goddess of the range does our cook play a notable part, her influence upon the waiting maids was out, the master answered, or the hateful cat winds round the smoke down the chimney; or the mistress has expressly wished this or that so made and not otherwise, or the fire, or the wind, anywhere except in the single, faultless one among all these fallible things, in the ever perfect cook. Not alone as preparator of food, not alone as goddess of the range does our cook play a notable part, her influence upon the waiting maids was out, the master answered, or the hateful cat winds round the smoke down the chimney; or the mistress has expressly wished this or that so made and not otherwise, or the fire, or the wind, anywhere except in the single, faultless one among all these fallible things, in the ever perfect cook.

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event. It sometimes happens that the parents of the groom are opposed to the affair because the girl is poor, "and so the interchange of frequent vows becomes quite necessary, and sometimes even journey together to the home of the lovers. From time to time the master of the house gets a sight of this lover, especially if he chances to go or return at an unaccustomed hour; sometimes at the gate, sometimes on the stairs. He has long been convinced of the honest intentions of the wooer, and of the truth of the statements concerning the numerous family circumstances, until one day he discovers that the appearance of this lover does not have the requisite stability. The slim blond whom he has met two or three times has suddenly changed into a little brown one, or the civil figure of the former man is metamorphosed into the unformed one of a soldier, etc. Still the cook can account for the change of decoration. "He" is sick; he has injured leg or arm in the factory, and has sent his brother or trusted friend to the desolate one, to bring his greetings, or to tell that the parents have at last relented.

This pretended love messenger "is an amiable creature she has known him so long." This to explain any extra warmth which the master may have noticed in his demeanor toward each other. And only when this surprising change of persons has recurred several times, does the cook find herself forced to explain that it is all off with the old love, the mother was inexorable, poor fellow, he was very unhappy, but it could not be helped, and so—and now a very respectable gentleman has presented himself. A gentleman, not a person, and has made her an offer; a merchant with \$500 salary; a widower, who can marry her immediately, and have his minority precipitately annulled, and she will still have saved something for a "fitting out." Her employees, though grown sceptical, close their eyes, until coming one evening from a party, perhaps rather early, they discover that a party has been in progress in their own salon, and they find the "gentleman," not having had time to escape in the kitchen. 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