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THE SERVANT CLASS ON THE FARM AND IN THE SLUMS.

BY BOLTON HALL.

"IT is useless trying to help the poor; they love the tenements, and would rather have shop wages too low to live upon than take places as help. The lower classes are the lazy, the improvident, and the dishonest.
"'It's them as never knows where a meal's to be 'ad;
Take my word for it, Sammy, the poor in the lump is bad.'
"They are drunken, discontented, vicious, and will not go to the country. Theories are all very well, but the whole trouble is the wickedness of the human heart, and the only thing that is really effectual is to preach the gospel to them."

In the main, however, even the bad seek their own interest. Ill-doing without motive is rare—we call it some mania when it occurs in the rich. Evil is commonly done to obtain something which is, or at least seems, desirable. As the poor are not destitute of all intelligence, we may be sure that, apart from questions of right or wrong, they do what they believe to be most for their own happiness. Clearly they think it more for their happiness to stay in the shops and slums, rather than to take service or go to the country. Are they right for once?

We have charitable societies which would train some hundreds annually of New York's hundred thousand women servants; and first-class places offer high wages. As shop girls have to work hard and are not the class to whom wages are no object, let us see why those feeling so keenly the want of money do not avail themselves of such splendid opportunities. When we reach old age or even middle life, it is hard, often fatal, to change our habits. It would be unreasonable then to expect anyone but the young to do so.

Let us suppose then that an industrious girl has learned her duties in a Society, and under a matron so tactful that the pupil (not realizing that she is receiving charity) has lost none of her self-respect. She is a chambermaid or waitress, and as such should get from sixteen to twenty-two dollars per month with board. Why does she prefer to provide for herself on six dollars a week in a shop, or on four dollars in a factory?

In the first place, an ordinary woman cannot get a first-class place. She must be neat, strong, quick, capable, willing, trained, good-tempered, nice-looking, well-mannered, strictly sober, and content to resign the visits of men. Many require her to belong to their own communion, to wear a cap, and to be religious as well. Are such virtues the natural products of the slums, or are they learned in a charity school? Such persons do not need your aid or anyone's else.

How many of your friends would you take for servants? One is delicate, another irritable, another indolent, another incapable, inexperienced, or noisy, another too fond of men's society, grim, pert, a little giddy, overdressed, dowdy, ugly, or "quite too pretty to have in the house." Most of us would sit for weeks in an intelligence office before we should get a place, and when

we did, should leave it the same night.

But in the country, says some one, or in poorer houses, so much is not required, and yet it is almost impossible to get servants for flats or country houses. Naturally: you have horses, entertainments, study, books, art, and acquaintances with which to amuse yourself; the servant girl has nothing but her acquaintances. In a flat or in the country she is asked to give up the one poor pleasure that saves her from utter mental death, that sympathetic notice of what is going on, which, when we hear it, we call gossip; when we read it, news. The servant, moreover, must give up her liberty. From six in the morning till ten at night, always she must listen for the bell; from dawn to midnight always be at the disposal of other women, not always angels, not always even ladies. Such are the requirements. What are the rewards? Sixty or seventy cents a day, social degradation, and probably to die an old maid. There is no use blinking it; you might kiss a nice shop girl; you would not sit down to a table with a servant. They are not "help" at all.. They are menials. The servant learns to know refinement, so that she will not marry a truckman; yet even the coachman thinks her beneath him; a decent mechanic will marry only some one whom he can call a "lady."

The shop girl is her superior. The shop is hot and stuffy; is it worse than the kitchen? The shop girl's hours are long, but they have an end. Her food is poor, but it is seasoned with liberty. To take service is almost to take the vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Truly it is wonderful that there are any good servants at all.

Your butler drinks; they nearly all drink. When they do not, they save money, go into business, and generally lose it, and then, discouraged, come back to service. Yet butlers are ordinary men; no better, no worse, than others; there must be some reason why they drink. The reason is that their hours are long, they are not usually intellectual, and they have no amusement or recreation; they cannot even smoke except on their evenings out in the club or at the corner saloon. Perhaps they see wines drunk and hear them praised at table; what wonder if they taste and try to find a little stimulus in the bottle? Men fall on the side on which they are tempted. Good butlers are scarce. What good mother would wish to see her son a butler at double the wages of a clerk? She knows that unions shut him out from a trade, and that he must choose one or the other; that he cannot go to the fields.

Men are usually convinced only by themselves; if you are willing so to be convinced, it is easy to try it. Ask any poor person why he does not go to the country. The first question is, "Where should the like of me go?" "Oh, go West; go anywhere;" that is the usual philanthropic plan. But if you have a definite place in your mind, you must answer next, "What should I be doing out there, knowing nobody?" Farm? They have no land, nor money to stock it. Work for a farmer? They know nothing of farm work, and a farmer would not be bothered with a feeble, narrow-chested stranger. If a foolish or good-natured farmer gives him a job, what shall he do in the winter, or if employment fail? Here, when the bit and the sup are gone, his neighbors will always lend or give; to whom shall he turn in the strange and desolate country? Finally, how is he to pay fares for the wife and children, and freight for his poor little furniture? The piteous great army of

tramps is full of those who have tried the country for employment, and failing have fallen from the ranks.

Yet, after all, if the denizen of the slums loves the slums without a reason; if the tenement-house child, like the jailbird, will fly back to his haunt, it is not with him that the difficulty lies. With the slums as they are we are prepared to deal. We have in New York City two thousand and forty charities. If our own country and other countries did not ceaselessly pour its youth into the towns, we might grapple with the pauperism which we have; but the flood of poverty rises only the faster as we build dams. It cannot be that these people coming from the country are also hopelessly corrupt, drunken, discontented, and vicious; but if they were, what would be the use of sending our own people out to the conditions which bring such results? If the life on the farms would so greatly improve our laborers, if work is so plentiful there, why, in spite of all our efforts, and in spite of the laws of demand and supply, does the current steadily set cityward? Because, however charming it may look at a distance, in the life of the farm are hardship, loneliness, and dulness inexpressible, with no prospect of end or improvement.

Is it not true that every generation brings up troops of honest, intelligent, pushing boys in the country as well as in the cities? Yet all over these Eastern States the farms are abandoned. The farmers, to the loss of help in the field, send their sons, first to the village, then to the city. They know by bitter trial that the best for which a farmer may hope as a reward for heavy toil is a bare living. Forced by the speculative value of land to a distance from the city, they know that the railroad, which takes their product for the market, takes their profit for itself; that to improve the farm is to invite the assessor; that of those things to pay for which they are taxed directly and indirectly, next to nothing comes to them; that as the joints get stiff and the soil wears out, the competition with machine labor and Western land becomes keener and yet more keen. So the bright boy decides that he, at least, will not travel that hard road which can lead only to failure. He will reach out for the great prizes gained in business, of which he hears so much. What wonder if he does not see the thousands who, almost unnoticed, sink in the struggle into the city slums?

And the city lad, with no taste for nature, at work since he was able to mind the baby—what tastes, what capabilities, what desires has he that the quiet and loneliness of a country cabin could gratify?

Do you really wish, not to justify yourself in profiting by lamentable tendencies by maintaining that they are due to the wickedness of the "lower classes," but to find out what is the matter? If so, you must try to find out the motives which guide the poor, and so alter conditions that they will lead upward rather than further down.

When you say that the poor are naturally lazy, intemperate, and improvident, you but show your utter ignorance and disregard of the real want of the poor,—the chance to work; you but furnish proof, if proof were needed, that human nature is bad. We, who make the laws that shut the workers out from the land, bind heavy burdens, and when the weak fall under them we cry to

heaven that our brother is unreasonable, vicious, and will not go to the country. O addle-headed, well-meaning, indefinite philanthropist, not because he is no good, but because he is no fool, does the man refuse to go to the country.