

THE AMERICAN WOMAN AND HER HOME

The Outlook has published two articles dealing with different aspects of the problems of American home life—"Some Failures of American Women," by Mrs. Newell Dwight Hillis, and "Our House in Order," by Mrs. W. O. Robb. The two problems therein discussed—the divorce problem and the servant problem—are in certain aspects quite widely separated, but in their common relation to the life of American women (and American men as well) in the home they have a strong bond of unity. These two papers have attracted considerable comment from Outlook readers, and we print here some of this comment, which seems to us to throw light from different angles upon this vital subject.—THE EDITORS.

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE WOMAN IN THE HOME

IT is with great interest that I have read the article by Mrs. Newell Dwight Hillis on "Some Failures of American Women" (The Outlook, July 16). But there is one large class of American women about whom Mrs. Hillis seems to be misinformed.

Mrs. Hillis says that the lack of necessity for actual manual work in the care of home and children, with the increased complexity of the housekeeping of to-day, combined with a higher education for girls, in which "the study of books is made paramount" and the art of home-making is left out, are direct causes for many unbearable conditions resulting in the divorces of women who, as girls, were brought up in homes of affluence.

It is the aim of women's colleges to graduate women who can take their places in the world and fill them successfully in whatever sphere they may happen to be, not excluding the home. It is the married college woman whom I feel has been wrongfully censured by Mrs. Hillis in an otherwise carefully written article. Technical training in the art of home-making is not included in the curricula of the women's colleges, but my observations prove that the married graduates of Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and Bryn Mawr have so been trained to think and to work systematically that in their homes there is a nearer approach to the perfection of economy of time and money and a proper distribution of labor, with the distinct atmosphere of the well-regulated home, than in many homes where the housewife has greater practical knowledge of cooking and sewing, but no head for system or the executive ability to direct even one domestic.

When one considers the ignorance and lack of intelligence of the people employed as house servants and seamstresses, and considers that in a short time this class of women command good wages and give fair results, it is my belief and experience that any well-educated girl can acquire in an extremely short time, if necessity demands, what makes these ignoramuses invaluable.

My observations also lead me to state with conviction that the girls who are brought up in homes of affluence, who have there had the advantages of higher education and of the best society, adapt themselves very readily to less affluent conditions after marriage, and, through their education both in college and in their homes, where they have learned much through living in an atmosphere of good housekeeping, prove themselves not only capable of creating a well-regulated home, but of entering into the partnership in the right way.

I do not undervalue technical education in home-making. Courses in cooking and sewing make a girl all the more proficient, of course, but even if they get crowded out by the more important college course and the subsequent year or two of "social engagements and idleness," I am confident of her success as a home-maker if it is in her at all. She may be deficient in this respect, and, if so, no number of courses in domestic schools of science will help her.

Home-making is an instinct to a large extent, and where it is accompanied by a well-trained mind the success of the home is assured.

The most convincing proof of the success of the girl of "higher education" as home maker is to be found in the very small percentage of divorces among college

women. "The busy idle woman" of the cities is of course a drag on society, as Mrs. Hillis says, but statistics would show that these women are largely from the not highly educated class.

With the smaller necessity for manual labor for women in their homes there is the greater possibility for women to be the intellectual companions of their husbands. This and the "kindergarten for the small child," instead of making the "imperative work of the housekeeper and mother less and less," enable her to make imperative the duty of taking an interest in the topics of the day in which all intelligent men are conversant and all intelligent women should be.

To English women, their country and its politics are a live interest. When the American woman is more like her English sister, she will find the American man not too weary to enter the atmosphere which she can help him create after business hours, and she will get what she wants most—his companionship.

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THE SERVANT QUESTION

The servant question, like the poor, we have always with us. Excellent and far-reaching as are many of the suggestions made in Mrs. Robb's "Our House in Order" in *The Outlook*, there are many housekeepers who do not find the problem solved for them by the system there set forth. Two intelligent, self-respecting women who come by the day, and the laundry work done out of the house, constitute a condition entirely beyond the reach of the ordinary housewife, however much such a plan would please her, and however capable she might be to get on smoothly under such a system.

Three-fourths of the women who are clamoring for better service can barely afford to keep one girl, at the present prices of food and wages; and yet help they must have or break down in health, or break up housekeeping. And so a multitude of women are on the verge of nervous collapse, and a multitude of families are unwillingly crowding second-rate boarding-houses.

Take a family where the income is \$1,500, and where there are three chil-

dren under eight years of age. If the mother is to get any outing with her husband, there must be a maid in the house in the evening. Then, not many women with three little children to care for can regularly prepare breakfast in time for the husband to "make his car." For such families outside help will not do.

I believe it is possible for any really intelligent woman to achieve success with the present system—one maid-of-all-work—despite the prejudice against housework which throws into it, for the most part, only the less capable class of working-girls.

First of all, the housewife should remember that really efficient service is rare, and if she gets it at all it will be the reward of her patient and skillful training; then she will not feel herself imposed upon because she does not find in her maid "all the Christian virtues." She should take care in the selection she makes, seeking above almost all other things willingness to be taught. Usually a good mistress can, by means of her reputation—for mistresses are sized up as well as servants—get a fairly good girl if she takes time. She will show her wisdom by not waiting till the last day of grace before she looks up a helper. A friend of mine—one of those women who have solved the problem—says, "I select my servants with as much care as I do my friends."

Next, there must be systematic care for the girl's comfort. She is a part of the household, and the efficient housewife looks to the comfort of all. The maid should have, to develop her self-respect, a neat and tasteful room. Her work should be watched that she may not be overburdened. The hours are long in domestic service, but with judicious planning there may be, on most days, several hours of leisure. These a wise mistress will encourage a girl, by the use of the sewing-machine and an occasional gift of pretty material, to employ for the improvement of her wardrobe; and, by the offer of interesting books, for the improvement of her mind. That a girl has no such leisure, but is expected as soon as her work is done to take the baby, or do some other task, is mismanagement; and to this is owing in large measure the vexatious habit many girls have of dawdling over their work and never getting through.