

Stowe Harriet Beecher

The Chimney-Corner



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The Chimney-Corner

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The Chimney-Corner

I.

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH HER? OR, THE WOMAN QUESTION

"Well, what will you do with her?" said I to my wife.

My wife had just come down from an interview with a pale, faded-looking young woman in rusty black attire, who had called upon me on the very common supposition that I was an editor of the "Atlantic Monthly."

By the by, this is a mistake that brings me, Christopher Crowfield, many letters that do not belong to me, and which might with equal pertinency be addressed, "To the Man in the Moon." Yet these letters often make my heart ache, – they speak so of people who strive and sorrow and want help; and it is hard to be called on in plaintive tones for help which you know it is perfectly impossible for you to give.

For instance, you get a letter in a delicate hand, setting forth the old distress, – she is poor, and she has looking to her for support those that are poorer and more helpless than herself: she has tried sewing, but can make little at it; tried teaching, but cannot now get a school, – all places being filled, and more than filled; at last has tried literature, and written some little things, of which she sends you a modest specimen, and wants your opinion whether she can gain her living by writing. You run over the articles, and perceive at a glance that there is no kind of hope or use in her trying to do anything at literature; and then you ask yourself, mentally, "What is to be done with her? What can she do?"

Such was the application that had come to me this morning, – only, instead of by note, it came, as I have said, in the person of the applicant, a thin, delicate, consumptive-looking being, wearing that rusty mourning which speaks sadly at once of heart-bereavement and material poverty.

My usual course is to turn such cases over to Mrs. Crowfield; and it is to be confessed that this worthy woman spends a large portion of her time, and wears out an extraordinary amount of shoe-leather, in performing the duties of a self-constituted intelligence-office.

Talk of giving money to the poor! what is that, compared to giving sympathy, thought, time, taking their burdens upon you, sharing their perplexities? They who are able to buy off every application at the door of their heart with a five or ten dollar bill are those who free themselves at least expense.

My wife had communicated to our friend, in the gentlest tones and in the blandest manner, that her poor little pieces, however interesting to her own household circle, had nothing in them wherewith to enable her to make her way in the thronged and crowded thoroughfare of letters, – that they had no more strength or adaptation to win bread for her than a broken-winged butterfly to draw a plough; and it took some resolution in the background of her tenderness to make the poor applicant entirely certain of this. In cases like this, absolute certainty is the very greatest, the only true kindness.

It was grievous, my wife said, to see the discouraged shade which passed over her thin, tremulous features, when this certainty forced itself upon her. It is hard, when sinking in the waves, to see the frail bush at which the hand clutches uprooted; hard, when alone in the crowded thoroughfare of travel, to have one's last bank-note declared a counterfeit. I knew I should not be able to see her face, under the shade of this disappointment; and so, coward that I was, I turned this trouble, where I have turned so many others, upon my wife.

"Well, what shall we do with her?" said I.

"I really don't know," said my wife, musingly.

"Do you think we could get that school in Taunton for her?"

"Impossible; Mr. Herbert told me he had already twelve applicants for it."

"Couldn't you get her plain sewing? Is she handy with her needle?"

"She has tried that, but it brings on a pain in her side, and cough; and the doctor has told her it will not do for her to confine herself."

"How is her handwriting? Does she write a good hand?"

"Only passable."

"Because," said I, "I was thinking if I could get Steele and Simpson to give her law-papers to copy."

"They have more copyists than they need now; and, in fact, this woman does not write the sort of hand at all that would enable her to get on as a copyist."

"Well," said I, turning uneasily in my chair, and at last hitting on a bright masculine expedient, "I'll tell you what must be done. She must get married."

"My dear," said my wife, "marrying for a living is the very hardest way a woman can take to get it. Even marrying for love often turns out badly enough. Witness poor Jane."

Jane was one of the large number of people whom it seemed my wife's fortune to carry through life on her back. She was a pretty, smiling, pleasing daughter of Erin, who had been in our family originally as nursery-maid. I had been greatly pleased in watching a little idyllic affair growing up between her and a joyous, good-natured young Irishman, to whom at last we married her. Mike soon after, however, took to drinking and unsteady courses; and the result has been to Jane only a yearly baby, with poor health, and no money.

"In fact," said my wife, "if Jane had only kept single, she could have made her own way well enough, and might have now been in good health and had a pretty sum in the savings bank. As it is, I must carry not only her, but her three children, on my back."

"You ought to drop her, my dear. You really ought not to burden yourself with other people's affairs as you do," said I, inconsistently.

"How *can* I drop her? Can I help knowing that she is poor and suffering? And if I drop her, who will take her up?"

Now there is a way of getting rid of cases of this kind, spoken of in a quaint old book, which occurred strongly to me at this moment: —

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,' notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?"

I must confess, notwithstanding the strong point of the closing question, I looked with an evil eye of longing on this very easy way of disposing of such cases. A few sympathizing words, a few expressions of hope that I did not feel, a line written to turn the case into somebody else's hands, — any expedient, in fact, to hide the longing eyes and imploring hands from my sight, was what my carnal nature at this moment greatly craved.

"Besides," said my wife, resuming the thread of her thoughts in regard to the subject just now before us, "as to marriage, it's out of the question at present for this poor child; for the man she loved and would have married lies low in one of the graves before Richmond. It's a sad story, — one of a thousand like it. She brightened for a few moments, and looked almost handsome, when she spoke of his bravery and goodness. Her father and lover have both died in this war. Her only brother has returned from it a broken-down cripple, and she has him and her poor old mother to care for, and so she seeks work. I told her to come again to-morrow, and I would look about for her a little to-day."

"Let me see, how many are now down on your list to be looked about for, Mrs. Crowfield? — some twelve or thirteen, are there not? You've got Tom's sister disposed of finally, I hope, — that's a comfort!"

"Well, I'm sorry to say she came back on my hands yesterday," said my wife, patiently. "She is a foolish young thing, and said she didn't like living out in the country. I'm sorry, because the Morrises are an excellent family, and she might have had a life-home there, if she had only been steady, and chosen to behave herself properly. But yesterday I found her back on her mother's hands again; and the poor woman told me that the dear child never could bear to be separated from her, and that she hadn't the heart to send her back."

"And in short," said I, "she gave you notice that you must provide for Miss O'Connor in some more agreeable way. Cross that name off your list, at any rate. That woman and girl need a few hard raps in the school of experience before you can do anything for them."

"I think I shall," said my long-suffering wife; "but it 's a pity to see a young thing put in the direct road to ruin."

"It is one of the inevitables," said I, "and we must save our strength for those that are willing to help themselves."

"What's all this talk about?" said Bob, coming in upon us rather brusquely.

"O, as usual, the old question," said I, – "'What's to be done with her?'"

"Well," said Bob, "it's exactly what I've come to talk with mother about. Since she keeps a distressed-women's agency-office, I've come to consult her about Marianne. That woman will die before six months are out, a victim to high civilization and the Paddies. There we are, twelve miles out from Boston, in a country villa so convenient that every part of it might almost do its own work, – everything arranged in the most convenient, contiguous, self-adjusting, self-acting, patent-right, perfective manner, – and yet, I tell you, Marianne will die of that house. It will yet be recorded on her tombstone, 'Died of conveniences.' For myself, what I languish for is a log cabin, with a bed in one corner, a trundle-bed underneath for the children, a fireplace only six feet off, a table, four chairs, one kettle, a coffee-pot, and a tin baker, – that's all. I lived deliciously in an establishment of this kind last summer, when I was up at Lake Superior; and I am convinced, if I could move Marianne into it at once, that she would become a healthy and a happy woman. Her life is smothered out of her with comforts; we have too many rooms, too many carpets, too many vases and knick-knacks, too much china and silver; she has too many laces and dresses and bonnets; the children all have too many clothes; – in fact, to put it scripturally, our riches are corrupted, our garments are moth-eaten, our gold and our silver is cankered, – and, in short, Marianne is sick in bed, and I have come to the agency-office-for-distressed-women to take you out to attend to her.

"The fact is," continued Bob, "that since our cook married, and Alice went to California, there seems to be no possibility of putting our domestic cabinet upon any permanent basis. The number of female persons that have been through our house, and the ravages they have wrought on it for the last six months, pass belief. I had yesterday a bill of sixty dollars' plumbing to pay for damages of various kinds which had had to be repaired in our very convenient water-works; and the blame of each particular one had been bandied like a shuttlecock among our three household divinities. Bidy privately assured my wife that Kate was in the habit of emptying dust-pans of rubbish into the main drain from the chambers, and washing any little extra bits down through the bowls; and, in fact, when one of the bathing-room bowls had overflowed so as to damage the frescoes below, my wife, with great delicacy and precaution, interrogated Kate as to whether she had followed her instructions in the care of the water-pipes. Of course she protested the most immaculate care and circumspection. 'Sure, and she knew how careful one ought to be, and wasn't of the likes of them as wouldn't mind what throuble they made, – like Bidy, who would throw trash and hair in the pipes, and niver listen to her tellin'; sure, and hadn't she broken the pipes in the kitchen, and lost the stoppers, as it was a shame to see in a Christian house?' Ann, the third girl, being privately questioned, blamed Bidy on Monday, and Kate on Tuesday; on Wednesday, however, she exonerated both; but on Thursday, being in a high quarrel with both, she departed, accusing them severally, not only of all the evil practices afore-said, but of lying, and stealing, and all other miscellaneous wickednesses that came to hand.

Whereat the two thus accused rushed in, bewailing themselves and cursing Ann in alternate strophes, averring that she had given the baby laudanum, and, taking it out riding, had stopped for hours with it in a filthy lane, where the scarlet fever was said to be rife, – in short, made so fearful a picture, that Marianne gave up the child's life at once, and has taken to her bed. I have endeavored all I could to quiet her, by telling her that the scarlet-fever story was probably an extemporaneous work of fiction, got up to gratify the Hibernian anger at Ann; and that it wasn't in the least worth while to believe one thing more than another from the fact that any of the tribe said it. But she refuses to be comforted, and is so Utopian as to lie there, crying, 'O, if I only could get one that I could trust, – one that really would speak the truth to me, – one that I might know really went where she said she went, and really did as she said she did!' To have to live so, she says, and bring up little children with those she can't trust out of her sight, whose word is good for nothing, – to feel that her beautiful house and her lovely things are all going to rack and ruin, and she can't take care of them, and can't see where or when or how the mischief is done, – in short, the poor child talks as women do who are violently attacked with housekeeping fever tending to congestion of the brain. She actually yesterday told me that she wished, on the whole, she never had got married, which I take to be the most positive indication of mental alienation."

"Here," said I, "we behold at this moment two women dying for the want of what they can mutually give one another, – each having a supply of what the other needs, but held back by certain invisible cobwebs, slight but strong, from coming to each other's assistance. Marianne has money enough, but she wants a helper in her family, such as all her money has been hitherto unable to buy; and here, close at hand, is a woman who wants home-shelter, healthy, varied, active, cheerful labor, with nourishing food, kind care, and good wages. What hinders these women from rushing to the help of one another, just as two drops of water on a leaf rush together and make one? Nothing but a miserable prejudice, – but a prejudice so strong that women will starve in any other mode of life, rather than accept competency and comfort in this."

"You don't mean," said my wife, "to propose that our *protégée* should go to Marianne as a servant?"

"I do say it would be the best thing for her to do, – the only opening that I see, and a very good one, too, it is. Just look at it. Her bare living at this moment cannot cost her less than five or six dollars a week, – everything at the present time is so very dear in the city. Now by what possible calling open to her capacity can she pay her board and washing, fuel and lights, and clear a hundred and some odd dollars a year? She could not do it as a district school-teacher; she certainly cannot, with her feeble health, do it by plain sewing; she could not do it as a copyist. A robust woman might go into a factory, and earn more; but factory work is unintermitted, twelve hours daily, week in and out, in the same movement, in close air, amid the clatter of machinery; and a person delicately organized soon sinks under it. It takes a stolid, enduring temperament to bear factory labor. Now look at Marianne's house and family, and see what is insured to your *protégée* there.

"In the first place, a home, – a neat, quiet chamber, quite as good as she has probably been accustomed to, – the very best of food, served in a pleasant, light, airy kitchen, which is one of the most agreeable rooms in the house, and the table and table-service quite equal to those of most farmers and mechanics. Then her daily tasks would be light and varied, – some sweeping, some dusting, the washing and dressing of children, the care of their rooms and the nursery, – all of it the most healthful, the most natural work of a woman, – work alternating with rest, and diverting thought from painful subjects by its variety, – and what is more, a kind of work in which a good Christian woman might have satisfaction, as feeling herself useful in the highest and best way; for the child's nurse, if she be a pious, well-educated woman, may make the whole course of nursery-life an education in goodness. Then, what is far different from many other modes of gaining a livelihood, a woman in this capacity can make and feel herself really and truly beloved. The hearts of little children are easily gained, and their love is real and warm, and no true woman can become the object of it without feeling her own

life made brighter. Again, she would have in Marianne a sincere, warm-hearted friend, who would care for her tenderly, respect her sorrows, shelter her feelings, be considerate of her wants, and in every way aid her in the cause she has most at heart, – the succor of her family. There are many ways besides her wages in which she would infallibly be assisted by Marianne, so that the probability would be that she could send her little salary almost untouched to those for whose support she was toiling, – all this on her part."

"But," added my wife, "on the other hand, she would be obliged to associate and be ranked with common Irish servants."

"Well," I answered, "is there any occupation, by which any of us gain our living, which has not its disagreeable side? Does not the lawyer spend all his days either in a dusty office or in the foul air of a court-room? Is he not brought into much disagreeable contact with the lowest class of society? Are not his labors dry and hard and exhausting? Does not the blacksmith spend half his life in soot and grime, that he may gain a competence for the other half? If this woman were to work in a factory, would she not often be brought into associations distasteful to her? Might it not be the same in any of the arts and trades in which a living is to be got? There must be unpleasant circumstances about earning a living in any way; only I maintain that those which a woman would be likely to meet with as a servant in a refined, well-bred, Christian family would be less than in almost any other calling. Are there no trials to a woman, I beg to know, in teaching a district school, where all the boys, big and little, of a neighborhood congregate? For my part, were it my daughter or sister who was in necessitous circumstances, I would choose for her a position such as I name, in a kind, intelligent, Christian family, before many of those to which women do devote themselves."

"Well," said Bob, "all this has a good sound enough, but it's quite impossible. It's true, I verily believe, that such a kind of servant in our family would really prolong Marianne's life years, – that it would improve her health, and be an unspeakable blessing to her, to me, and the children, – and I would almost go down on my knees to a really well-educated, good, American woman who would come into our family, and take that place; but I know it's perfectly vain and useless to expect it. You know we have tried the experiment two or three times of having a person in our family who should be on the footing of a friend, yet do the duties of a servant, and that we *never* could make it work well. These half-and-half people are so sensitive, so exacting in their demands, so hard to please, that we have come to the firm determination that we will have no sliding-scale in our family, and that whoever we are to depend on must come with *bona-fide* willingness to take the position of a servant, such as that position is in our house; and *that*, I suppose, your *protégée* would never do, even if she could thereby live easier, have less hard work, better health, and quite as much money as she could earn in any other way."

"She would consider it a personal degradation, I suppose," said my wife.

"And yet, if she only knew it," said Bob, "I should respect her far more profoundly for her willingness to take that position, when adverse fortune has shut other doors."

"Well, now," said I, "this woman is, as I understand, the daughter of a respectable stone-mason; and the domestic habits of her early life have probably been economical and simple. Like most of our mechanics' daughters, she has received in one of our high schools an education which has cultivated and developed her mind far beyond those of her parents and the associates of her childhood. This is a common fact in our American life. By our high schools the daughters of plain workingmen are raised to a state of intellectual culture which seems to make the disposition of them in any kind of industrial calling a difficult one. They all want to teach school, – and school-teaching, consequently, is an overcrowded profession, – and, failing that, there is only millinery and dressmaking. Of late, it is true, efforts have been made in various directions to widen their sphere. Type-setting and book-keeping are in some instances beginning to be open to them.

"All this time there is lying, neglected and despised, a calling to which womanly talents and instincts are peculiarly fitted, – a calling full of opportunities of the most lasting usefulness, – a calling

which insures a settled home, respectable protection, healthful exercise, good air, good food, and good wages, – a calling in which a woman may make real friends, and secure to herself warm affection; and yet this calling is the one always refused, shunned, contemned, left to the alien and the stranger, and that simply and solely because it bears the name of *servant*. A Christian woman, who holds the name of Christ in her heart in true devotion, would think it the greatest possible misfortune and degradation to become like him in taking upon her 'the form of a servant.' The founder of Christianity says, 'Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat or he that serveth? But *I* am among you as he that serveth.' But notwithstanding these so plain declarations of Jesus, we find that scarce any one in a Christian land will accept real advantages of position and employment that come with that name and condition."

"I suppose," said my wife, "I could prevail upon this woman to do all the duties of the situation, if she could be, as they phrase it, 'treated as one of the family.'"

"That is to say," said Bob, "if she could sit with us at the same table, be introduced to our friends, and be in all respects as one of us. Now as to this, I am free to say that I have no false aristocratic scruples. I consider every well-educated woman as fully my equal, not to say my superior; but it does not follow from this that she would be one whom I should wish to make a third party with me and my wife at mealtimes. Our meals are often our seasons of privacy, – the times when we wish in perfect unreserve to speak of matters that concern ourselves and our family alone. Even invited guests and family friends would not be always welcome, however agreeable at times. Now a woman may be perfectly worthy of respect, and we may be perfectly respectful to her, whom nevertheless we do not wish to take into the circle of intimate friendship. I regard the position of a woman who comes to perform domestic service as I do any other business relation. We have a very respectable young lady in our employ, who does legal copying for us, and all is perfectly pleasant and agreeable in our mutual relations; but the case would be far otherwise, were she to take it into her head that we treated her with contempt, because my wife did not call on her, and because she was not occasionally invited to tea. Besides, I apprehend that a woman of quick sensibilities, employed in domestic service, and who was so far treated as a member of the family as to share our table, would find her position even more painful and embarrassing than if she took once for all the position of a servant. We could not control the feelings of our friends; we could not always insure that they would be free from aristocratic prejudice, even were we so ourselves. We could not force her upon their acquaintance, and she might feel far more slighted than she would in a position where no attentions of any kind were to be expected. Besides which, I have always noticed that persons standing in this uncertain position are objects of peculiar antipathy to the servants in full; that they are the cause of constant and secret cabals and discontents; and that a family where the two orders exist has always raked up in it the smouldering embers of a quarrel ready at any time to burst out into open feud."

"Well," said I, "here lies the problem of American life. Half our women, like Marianne, are being faded and made old before their time by exhausting endeavors to lead a life of high civilization and refinement with only such untrained help as is washed up on our shores by the tide of emigration. Our houses are built upon a plan that precludes the necessity of much hard labor, but requires rather careful and nice handling. A well-trained, intelligent woman, who had vitalized her finger-ends by means of a well-developed brain, could do all the work of such a house with comparatively little physical fatigue. So stands the case as regards our houses. Now over against the women that are perishing in them from too much care, there is another class of American women that are wandering up and down, perishing for lack of some remunerating employment. That class of women, whose developed brains and less developed muscles mark them as peculiarly fitted for the performance of the labors of a high civilization, stand utterly aloof from paid domestic service. Sooner beg, sooner starve, sooner marry for money, sooner hang on as dependants in families where they know they are not wanted, than accept of a quiet home, easy, healthful work, and certain wages, in these refined and pleasant modern dwellings of ours."

"What is the reason of this?" said Bob.

"The reason is, that we have not yet come to the full development of Christian democracy. The taint of old aristocracies is yet pervading all parts of our society. We have not yet realized fully the true dignity of labor, and the surpassing dignity of domestic labor. And I must say that the valuable and courageous women who have agitated the doctrines of Woman's Rights among us have not in all things seen their way clear in this matter."

"Don't talk to me of those creatures," said Bob, "those men-women, those anomalies, neither flesh nor fish, with their conventions, and their cracked woman-voices strained in what they call public speaking, but which I call public squeaking! No man reverences true women more than I do. I hold a real, true, thoroughly good *woman*, whether in my parlor or my kitchen, as my superior. She can always teach me something that I need to know. She has always in her somewhat of the divine gift of prophecy; but in order to keep it, she must remain a woman. When she crops her hair, puts on pantaloons, and strides about in conventions, she is an abortion, and not a woman."

"Come! come!" said I, "after all, speak with deference. We that choose to wear soft clothing and dwell in kings' houses must respect the Baptists, who wear leathern girdles, and eat locusts and wild honey. They are the voices crying in the wilderness, preparing the way for a coming good. They go down on their knees in the mire of life to lift up and brighten and restore a neglected truth; and we that have not the energy to share their struggle should at least refrain from criticising their soiled garments and ungraceful action. There have been excrescences, eccentricities, peculiarities, about the camp of these reformers; but the body of them have been true and noble women, and worthy of all the reverence due to such. They have already in many of our States reformed the laws relating to woman's position, and placed her on a more just and Christian basis. It is through their movements that in many of our States a woman can hold the fruits of her own earnings, if it be her ill luck to have a worthless, drunken spendthrift for a husband. It is owing to their exertions that new trades and professions are opening to woman; and all that I have to say of them is, that in the suddenness of their zeal for opening new paths for her feet, they have not sufficiently considered the propriety of straightening, widening, and mending the one broad, good old path of domestic labor, established by God himself. It does appear to me, that, if at least a portion of their zeal could be spent in removing the stones out of this highway of domestic life, and making it pleasant and honorable, they would effect even more. I would not have them leave undone what they are doing; but I would, were I worthy to be considered, humbly suggest to their prophetic wisdom and enthusiasm, whether, in this new future of women which they wish to introduce, women's natural, God-given employment of *domestic service* is not to receive a new character, and rise in a new form.

"'To love and serve' is a motto worn with pride on some aristocratic family shields in England. It ought to be graven on the Christian shield. *Servant* is the name which Christ gives to the *Christian*; and in speaking of his kingdom as distinguished from earthly kingdoms, he distinctly said, that rank there should be conditioned, not upon desire to command, but on willingness to serve.

"'Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your *servant*.'

"Why is it, that this name of servant, which Christ says is the highest in the kingdom of heaven, is so dishonored among us professing Christians, that good women will beg or starve, will suffer almost any extreme of poverty and privation, rather than accept home, competence, security, with this honored name?"

"The fault with many of our friends of the Woman's Rights order," said my wife, "is the depreciatory tone in which they have spoken of the domestic labors of a family as being altogether below the scope of the faculties of woman. '*Domestic drudgery*' they call it, – an expression that has done more harm than any two words that ever were put together.

"Think of a woman's calling clear-starching and ironing domestic drudgery, and to better the matter turning to type-setting in a grimy printing-office! Call the care of china and silver, the

sweeping of carpets, the arrangement of parlors and sitting-rooms, drudgery; and go into a factory and spend the day amid the whir and clatter and thunder of machinery, inhaling an atmosphere loaded with wool and machine-grease, and keeping on the feet for twelve hours, nearly continuously! Think of its being called drudgery to take care of a clean, light, airy nursery, to wash and dress and care for two or three children, to mend their clothes, tell them stories, make them playthings, take them out walking or driving; and rather than this, to wear out the whole livelong day, extending often deep into the night, in endless sewing, in a close room of a dressmaking establishment! Is it any less drudgery to stand all day behind a counter, serving customers, than to tend a door-bell and wait on a table? For my part," said my wife, "I have often thought the matter over, and concluded, that, if I were left in straitened circumstances, as many are in a great city, I would seek a position as a servant in one of our good families."

"I envy the family that you even think of in that connection," said I. "I fancy the amazement which would take possession of them as you began to develop among them."

"I have always held," said my wife, "that family work, in many of its branches, can be better performed by an educated woman than an uneducated one. Just as an army where even the bayonets think is superior to one of mere brute force and mechanical training, so, I have heard it said, some of our distinguished modern female reformers show an equal superiority in the domestic sphere, – and I do not doubt it. Family work was never meant to be the special province of untaught brains. I have sometimes thought I should like to show what I could do as a servant."

"Well," said Bob, "to return from all this to the question, What's to be done with her? Are you going to *my* distressed woman? If you are, suppose you take *your* distressed woman along, and ask her to try it. I can promise her a pleasant house, a quiet room by herself, healthful and not too hard work, a kind friend, and some leisure for reading, writing, or whatever other pursuit of her own she may choose for her recreation. We are always quite willing to lend books to any who appreciate them. Our house is surrounded by pleasant grounds, which are open to our servants as to ourselves. So let her come and try us. I am quite sure that country air, quiet security, and moderate exercise in a good home, will bring up her health; and if she is willing to take the one or two disagreeables which may come with all this, let her try us."

"Well," said I, "so be it; and would that all the women seeking homes and employment could thus fall in with women who have homes and are perishing in them for want of educated helpers!"

On this question of woman's work I have yet more to say, but must defer it till another time.

II. WOMAN'S SPHERE

"What do you think of this Woman's Rights question?" said Bob Stephens. "From some of your remarks, I apprehend that you think there is something in it. I may be wrong, but I must confess that I have looked with disgust on the whole movement. No man reverences women as I do; but I reverence them *as* women. I reverence them for those very things in which their sex differs from ours; but when they come upon our ground, and begin to work and fight after our manner and with our weapons, I regard them as fearful anomalies, neither men nor women. These Woman's Rights Conventions appear to me to have ventilated crudities, absurdities, and blasphemies. To hear them talk about men, one would suppose that the two sexes were natural-born enemies, and wonders whether they ever had fathers and brothers. One would think, upon their showing, that all men were a set of ruffians, in league against women, – they seeming, at the same time, to forget how on their very platforms the most constant and gallant defenders of their rights are men. Wendell Phillips and Wentworth Higginson have put at the service of the cause masculine training and manly vehemence, and complacently accepted the wholesale abuse of their own sex at the hands of their warrior sisters. One would think, were all they say of female powers true, that our Joan-of-Arcs ought to have disdained to fight under male captains."

"I think," said my wife, "that, in all this talk about the rights of men, and the rights of women, and the rights of children, the world seems to be forgetting what is quite as important, the *duties* of men and women and children. We all hear of our *rights* till we forget our *duties*; and even theology is beginning to concern itself more with what man has a right to expect of his Creator than what the Creator has a right to expect of man."

"You say the truth," said I; "there is danger of just this overaction; and yet rights must be discussed; because, in order to understand the duties we owe to any class, we must understand their rights. To know our duties to men, women, and children, we must know what the rights of men, women, and children justly are. As to the 'Woman's Rights movement,' it is not peculiar to America, it is part of a great wave in the incoming tide of modern civilization; the swell is felt no less in Europe, but it combs over and breaks on our American shore, because our great wide beach affords the best play for its waters; and as the ocean waves bring with them kelp, sea-weed, mud, sand, gravel, and even putrefying debris, which lie unsightly on the shore, and yet, on the whole, are healthful and refreshing, – so the Woman's Rights movement, with its conventions, its speech-makings, its crudities, and eccentricities, is nevertheless a part of a healthful and necessary movement of the human race towards progress. This question of Woman and her Sphere is now, perhaps, the greatest of the age. We have put Slavery under foot, and with the downfall of Slavery the only obstacle to the success of our great democratic experiment is overthrown, and there seems no limit to the splendid possibilities which it may open before the human race.

"In the reconstruction that is now coming there lies more than the reconstruction of States and the arrangement of the machinery of government. We need to know and feel, all of us, that, from the moment of the death of Slavery, we parted finally from the *régime* and control of all the old ideas formed under old oppressive systems of society, and came upon a new plane of life.

"In this new life we must never forget that we are a peculiar people, that we have to walk in paths unknown to the Old World, – paths where its wisdom cannot guide us, where its precedents can be of little use to us, and its criticisms, in most cases, must be wholly irrelevant. The history of our war has shown us of how little service to us in any important crisis the opinions and advice of the Old World can be. We have been hurt at what seemed to us the want of sympathy, the direct antagonism, of England. We might have been less hurt if we had properly understood that Providence had placed

us in a position so far ahead of her ideas or power of comprehension, that just judgment or sympathy was not to be expected from her.

"As we went through our great war with no help but that of God, obliged to disregard the misconceptions and impertinences which the foreign press rained down upon us, so, if we are wise, we shall continue to do. Our object must now be to make the principles on which our government is founded permeate consistently the mass of society, and to purge out the leaven of aristocratic and Old World ideas. So long as there is an illogical working in our actual life, so long as there is any class denied equal rights with other classes, so long will there be agitation and trouble."

"Then," said my wife, "you believe that women ought to vote?"

"If the principle on which we founded our government is true, that taxation must not exist without representation, and if women hold property and are taxed, it follows that women should be represented in the State by their votes, or there is an illogical working of our government."

"But, my dear, don't you think that this will have a bad effect on the female character?"

"Yes," said Bob, "it will make women caucus-holders, political candidates."

"It may make this of some women, just as of some men," said I. "But all men do not take any great interest in politics; it is very difficult to get some of the best of them to do their duty in voting; and the same will be found true among women."

"But, after all," said Bob, "what do you gain? What will a woman's vote be but a duplicate of that of her husband or father, or whatever man happens to be her adviser?"

"That may be true on a variety of questions; but there are subjects on which the vote of women would, I think, be essentially different from that of men. On the subjects of temperance, public morals, and education, I have no doubt that the introduction of the female vote into legislation, in States, counties, and cities, would produce results very different from that of men alone. There are thousands of women who would close grogshops, and stop the traffic in spirits, if they had the legislative power; and it would be well for society if they had. In fact, I think that a State can no more afford to dispense with the vote of women in its affairs than a family. Imagine a family where the female has no voice in the housekeeping! A State is but a larger family, and there are many of its concerns which equally with those of a private household would be bettered by female supervision."

"But fancy women going to those horrible voting-places! It is more than I can do myself," said Bob.

"But you forget," said I, "that they are horrible and disgusting principally because women never go to them. All places where women are excluded tend downward to barbarism; but the moment she is introduced, there come in with her courtesy, cleanliness, sobriety, and order. When a man can walk up to the ballot-box with his wife or his sister on his arm, voting-places will be far more agreeable than now; and the polls will not be such bear-gardens that refined men will be constantly tempted to omit their political duties there."

"If for nothing else, I would have women vote, that the business of voting may not be so disagreeable and intolerable to men of refinement as it now is; and I sincerely believe that the cause of good morals, good order, cleanliness, and public health would be a gainer, not merely by the added feminine vote, but by the added vote of a great many excellent, but too fastidious men, who are now kept from the polls by the disagreeables they meet there."

"Do you suppose, that, if women had equal representation with men in the municipal laws of New York, its reputation for filth during the last year would have gone so far beyond that of Cologne, or any other city renowned for bad smells? I trow not. I believe a *lady-mayoreess* would have brought in a dispensation of brooms and whitewash, and made a terrible searching into dark holes and vile corners, before now. *Female* New York, I have faith to believe, has yet left in her enough of the primary instincts of womanhood to give us a clean, healthy city, if female votes had any power to do it."

"But," said Bob, "you forget that voting would bring together all the women of the lower classes."

"Yes; but thanks to the instincts of their sex, they would come in their Sunday clothes; for where is the woman that hasn't her finery, and will not embrace every chance to show it? Biddy's parasol, and hat with pink ribbons, would necessitate a clean shirt in Pat as much as on Sunday. Voting would become a *fête*, and we should have a population at the polls as well dressed as at church. Such is my belief."

"I do not see," said Bob, "but you go to the full extent with our modern female reformers."

"There are certain neglected truths, which have been held up by these reformers, that are gradually being accepted and infused into the life of modern society; and their recognition will help to solidify and purify democratic institutions. They are, —

"1. The right of every woman to hold independent property.

"2. The right of every woman to receive equal pay with man for work which she does equally well.

"3. The right of any woman to do any work for which, by her natural organization and talent, she is peculiarly adapted.

"Under the first head, our energetic sisters have already, by the help of their gallant male adjutants, reformed the laws of several of our States, so that a married woman is no longer left the unprotected legal slave of any unprincipled, drunken spendthrift who may be her husband, — but, in case of the imbecility or improvidence of the natural head of the family, the wife, if she have the ability, can conduct business, make contracts, earn and retain money for the good of the household; and I am sure no one can say that immense injustice and cruelty are not thereby prevented.

"It is quite easy for women who have the good fortune to have just and magnanimous husbands to say that they feel no interest in such reforms, and that they would willingly trust their property to the man to whom they give themselves; but they should remember that laws are not made for the restraint of the generous and just, but of the dishonest and base. The law which enables a married woman to hold her own property does not forbid her to give it to the man of her heart, if she so pleases; and it does protect many women who otherwise would be reduced to the extremest misery. I once knew an energetic milliner who had her shop attached four times, and a flourishing business broken up in four different cities, because she was tracked from city to city by a worthless spendthrift, who only waited till she had amassed a little property in a new place to swoop down upon and carry it off. It is to be hoped that the time is not distant when every State will give to woman a fair chance to the ownership and use of her own earnings and her own property.

"Under the head of the right of every woman to do any work for which by natural organization and talent she is especially adapted, there is a word or two to be said.

"The talents and tastes of the majority of women are naturally domestic. The family is evidently their sphere, because in all ways their organization fits them for that more than for anything else.

"But there are occasionally women who are exceptions to the common law, gifted with peculiar genius and adaptations. With regard to such women, there has never seemed to be any doubt in the verdict of mankind, that they ought to follow their nature, and that their particular *sphere* was the one to which they are called. Did anybody ever think that Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Kemble and Ristori had better have applied themselves sedulously to keeping house, because they were women, and 'woman's noblest station is retreat?'

"The world has always shown a fair average of good sense in this matter, — from the days of the fair Hypatia in Alexandria, who, we are told, gave lectures on philosophy behind a curtain, lest her charms should distract the attention of too impressible young men, down to those of Anna Dickinson. Mankind are not, after all, quite fools, and seem in these cases to have a reasonable idea that exceptional talents have exceptional laws, and make their own code of proprieties.

"Now there is no doubt that Miss Dickinson, though as relating to her femininity she is quite as pretty and modest a young woman as any to be found in the most sheltered circle, has yet a most exceptional talent for public speaking, which draws crowds to hear her, and makes lecturing for her a lucrative profession, as well as a means of advocating just and generous sentiments, and of stimulating her own sex to nobler purposes; and the same law which relates to Siddons and Kemble and Ristori relates also to her.

"The doctrine of *vocations* is a good one and a safe one. If a woman mistakes her vocation, so much the worse for her; the world does not suffer, but she does, and the suffering speedily puts her where she belongs. There is not near so much danger from attempts to imitate Anna Dickinson, as there is from the more common feminine attempts to rival the *demi-monde* of Paris in fantastic extravagance and luxury.

"As to how a woman may determine whether she has any such vocation, there is a story quite in point. A good Methodist elder was listening to an ardent young mechanic, who thought he had a call to throw up his shop and go to preaching.

"I feel,' said the young ardent, 'that I have a call to preach.'

"Hast thou noticed whether people seem to have a call to hear thee?' said the shrewd old man. 'I have always noticed that a true call of the Lord may be known by this, that people have a *call* to hear.'"

"Well," said Bob, "the most interesting question still remains: What are to be the employments of woman? What ways are there for her to use her talents, to earn her livelihood and support those who are dear to her, when Providence throws that necessity upon her? This is becoming more than ever one of the pressing questions of our age. The war has deprived so many thousands of women of their natural protectors, that everything must be thought of that may possibly open a way for their self-support."

"Well, let us look over the field," said my wife. "What is there for woman?"

"In the first place," said I, "come the professions requiring natural genius, – authorship, painting, sculpture, with the subordinate arts of photographing, coloring, and finishing; but when all is told, these furnish employment to a very limited number, – almost as nothing to the whole. Then there is teaching, which is profitable in its higher branches, and perhaps the very pleasantest of all the callings open to woman; but teaching is at present an overcrowded profession, the applicants everywhere outnumbering the places. Architecture and landscape-gardening are arts every way suited to the genius of woman, and there are enough who have the requisite mechanical skill and mathematical education; and though never yet thought of for the sex, that I know of, I do not despair of seeing those who shall find in this field a profession at once useful and elegant. When women plan dwelling-houses, the vast body of tenements to be let in our cities will wear a more domestic and comfortable air, and will be built more with reference to the real wants of their inmates."

"I have thought," said Bob, "that *agencies* of various sorts, as canvassing the country for the sale of books, maps, and engravings, might properly employ a great many women. There is a large class whose health suffers from confinement and sedentary occupations, who might, I think, be both usefully and agreeably employed in business of this sort, and be recruiting their health at the same time."

"Then," said my wife, "there is the medical profession."

"Yes," said I. "The world is greatly obliged to Miss Blackwell and other noble pioneers who faced and overcame the obstacles to the attainment of a thorough medical education by females. Thanks to them, a new and lucrative profession is now open to educated women in relieving the distresses of their own sex; and we may hope that in time, through their intervention, the care of the sick may also become the vocation of cultivated, refined, intelligent women, instead of being left, as heretofore, to the ignorant and vulgar. The experience of our late war has shown us what women of a high class morally and intellectually can do in this capacity. Why should not this experience inaugurate a new and sacred calling for refined and educated women? Why should not NURSING

become a vocation equal in dignity and in general esteem to the medical profession, of which it is the right hand? Why should our dearest hopes, in the hour of their greatest peril, be committed into the hands of Sairey Gamps, when the world has seen Florence Nightingales?"

"Yes, indeed," said my wife; "I can testify, from my own experience, that the sufferings and dangers of the sick-bed, for the want of intelligent, educated nursing, have been dreadful. A prejudiced, pig-headed, snuff-taking old woman, narrow-minded and vulgar, and more confident in her own way than seven men that can render a reason, enters your house at just the hour and moment when all your dearest earthly hopes are brought to a crisis. She becomes absolute dictator over your delicate, helpless wife and your frail babe, – the absolute dictator of all in the house. If it be her sovereign will and pleasure to enact all sorts of physiological absurdities in the premises, who shall say her nay? 'She knows her business, she hopes!' And if it be her edict, as it was of one of her class whom I knew, that each of her babies shall eat four baked beans the day it is four days old, eat them it must; and if the baby die in convulsions four days after, it is set down as the mysterious will of an overruling Providence.

"I know and have seen women lying upon laced pillows under silken curtains, who have been bullied and dominated over in the hour of their greatest helplessness by ignorant and vulgar tyrants, in a way that would scarce be thought possible in civilized society, and children that have been injured or done to death by the same means. A celebrated physician told me of a babe whose eyesight was nearly ruined by its nurse taking a fancy to wash its eyes with camphor, 'to keep it from catching cold,' she said. I knew another infant that was poisoned by the nurse giving it laudanum in some of those patent nostrums which these ignorant creatures carry secretly in their pockets, to secure quiet in their little charges. I knew one delicate woman who never recovered from the effects of being left at her first confinement in the hands of an ill-tempered, drinking nurse, and whose feeble infant was neglected and abused by this woman in a way to cause lasting injury. In the first four weeks of infancy the constitution is peculiarly impressible; and infants of a delicate organization may, if frightened and ill-treated, be the subjects of just such a shock to the nervous system as in mature age comes from the sudden stroke of a great affliction or terror. A bad nurse may affect nerves predisposed to weakness in a manner they never will recover from. I solemnly believe that the constitutions of more women are broken up by bad nursing in their first confinement than by any other cause whatever. And yet there are at the same time hundreds and thousands of women wanting the means of support, whose presence in a sick-room would be a benediction. I do trust that Miss Blackwell's band of educated nurses will not be long in coming, and that the number of such may increase till they effect a complete revolution in this vocation. A class of cultivated, well-trained, intelligent nurses would soon elevate the employment of attending on the sick into the noble calling it ought to be, and secure for it its appropriate rewards."

"There is another opening for woman," said I, – "in the world of business. The system of commercial colleges now spreading over our land is a new and a most important development of our times. There that large class of young men who have either no time or no inclination for an extended classical education can learn what will fit them for that active material life which in our broad country needs so many workers. But the most pleasing feature of these institutions is, that the complete course is open to women no less than to men, and women there may acquire that knowledge of book-keeping and accounts, and of the forms and principles of business transactions, which will qualify them for some of the lucrative situations hitherto monopolized by the other sex. And the expenses of the course of instruction are so arranged as to come within the scope of very moderate means. A fee of fifty dollars entitles a woman to the benefit of the whole course, and she has the privilege of attending at any hours that may suit her own engagements and convenience."

"Then, again," said my wife, "there are the departments of millinery and dressmaking, and the various branches of needle-work, which afford employment to thousands of women; there is type-setting, by which many are beginning to get a living; there are the manufactures of cotton, woollen,

silk, and the numberless useful articles which employ female hands in their fabrication, – all of them opening avenues by which, with more or less success, a subsistence can be gained."

"Well, really," said Bob, "it would appear, after all, that there are abundance of openings for women. What is the cause of the outcry and distress? How is it that we hear of women starving, driven to vice and crime by want, when so many doors of useful and profitable employment stand open to them?"

"The question would easily be solved," said my wife, "if you could once see the kind and class of women who thus suffer and starve. There may be exceptions, but too large a portion of them are girls and women who *can or will do no earthly thing well*, – and what is worse, are not willing to take the pains to be taught to do anything well. I will describe to you one girl, and you will find in every intelligence-office a hundred of her kind to five thoroughly trained ones.

"Imprimis: she is rather delicate and genteel-looking, and you may know from the arrangement of her hair just what the last mode is of disposing of rats or waterfalls. She has a lace bonnet with roses, a silk mantilla, a silk dress trimmed with velvet, a white skirt with sixteen tucks and an embroidered edge, a pair of cloth gaiters, underneath which are a pair of stockings without feet, the only pair in her possession. She has no under-linen, and sleeps at night in the working-clothes she wears in the day. She never seems to have in her outfit either comb, brush, or tooth-brush of her own, – neither needles, thread, scissors, nor pins; her money, when she has any, being spent on more important articles, such as the lace bonnet or silk mantilla, or the rats and waterfalls that glorify her head. When she wishes to sew, she borrows what is needful of a convenient next neighbor; and if she gets a place in a family as second girl, she expects to subsist in these respects by borrowing of the better-appointed servants, or helping herself from the family stores.

"She expects, of course, the very highest wages, if she condescends to live out; and by help of a trim outside appearance and the many vacancies that are continually occurring in households, she gets places, where her object is to do just as little of any duty assigned to her as possible, to hurry through her performances, put on her fine clothes, and go a-gadding. She is on free and easy terms with all the men she meets, and ready at jests and repartee, sometimes far from seemly. Her time of service in any one place lasts indifferently from a fortnight to two or three months, when she takes her wages, buys her a new parasol in the latest style, and goes back to the intelligence-office. In the different families where she has lived she has been told a hundred times the proprieties of household life, how to make beds, arrange rooms, wash china, glass, and silver, and set tables; but her habitual rule is to try in each place how small and how poor services will be accepted. When she finds less will not do, she gives more. When the mistress follows her constantly, and shows an energetic determination to be well served, she shows that she *can* serve well; but the moment such attention relaxes, she slides back again. She is as destructive to a house as a fire; the very spirit of wastefulness is in her; she cracks the china, dents the silver, stops the water-pipes with rubbish, and after she is gone, there is generally a sum equal to half her wages to be expended in repairing the effects of her carelessness. And yet there is one thing to be said for her: she is quite as careful of her employer's things as of her own. The full amount of her mischiefs often does not appear at once, as she is glib of tongue, adroit in apologies, and lies with as much alertness and as little thought of conscience as a blackbird chatters. It is difficult for people who have been trained from childhood in the school of verities, – who have been lectured for even the shadow of a prevarication, and shut up in disgrace for a lie, till truth becomes a habit of their souls, – it is very difficult for people so educated to understand how to get on with those who never speak the truth except by mere accident, who assert any and everything that comes into their heads with all the assurance and all the energy of perfect verity.

"What becomes of this girl? She finds means, by begging, borrowing, living out, to keep herself extremely trim and airy for a certain length of time, till the rats and waterfalls, the lace hat and parasol, and the glib tongue, have done their work in making a fool of some honest young mechanic

who earns three dollars a day. She marries him with no higher object than to have somebody to earn money for her to spend. And what comes of such marriages?

"That is *one* ending of her career; the other is on the street, in haunts of vice, in prison, in drunkenness, and death.

"Whence come these girls? They are as numerous as yellow butterflies in autumn; they flutter up to cities from the country; they grow up from mothers who ran the same sort of career before them; and the reason why in the end they fall out of all reputable employment and starve on poor wages is, that they become physically, mentally, and morally incapable of rendering any service which society will think worth paying for."

"I remember," said I, "that the head of the most celebrated dress-making establishment in New York, in reply to the appeals of the needle-women of the city for sympathy and wages, came out with published statements to this effect: that the difficulty lay not in unwillingness of employers to pay what work was worth, but in finding any work worth paying for; that she had many applicants, but among them few who could be of real use to her; that she, in common with everybody in this country who has any kind of serious responsibilities to carry, was continually embarrassed for want of skilled work-people, who could take and go on with the labor of her various departments without her constant supervision; that out of a hundred girls, there would not be more than five to whom she could give a dress to be made and dismiss it from her mind as something certain to be properly done.

"Let people individually look around their own little sphere, and ask themselves if they know any woman really excelling in any *valuable* calling or accomplishment who is suffering for want of work. All of us know seamstresses, dress-makers, nurses, and laundresses, who have made themselves such a reputation, and are so beset and overcrowded with work, that the whole neighborhood is constantly on its knees to them with uplifted hands. The fine seamstress, who can cut and make trousseaus and layettes in elegant perfection, is always engaged six months in advance; the pet dress-maker of a neighborhood must be engaged in May for September, and in September for May; a laundress who sends your clothes home in nice order always has all the work that she can do. Good work in any department is the rarest possible thing in our American life; and it is a fact that the great majority of workers, both in the family and out, do only tolerably well, – not so badly that it actually cannot be borne, yet not so well as to be a source of real, thorough satisfaction. The exceptional worker in every neighborhood, who does things really *well*, can always set her own price, and is always having more offering than she can possibly do.

"The trouble, then, in finding employment for women lies deeper than the purses or consciences of the employers; it lies in the want of education in women; the want of *education*, I say, – meaning by education that which fits a woman for practical and profitable employment in life, and not mere common school learning."

"Yes," said my wife; "for it is a fact that the most troublesome and hopeless persons to provide for are often those who have a good medium education, but no feminine habits, no industry, no practical calculation, no muscular strength, and no knowledge of any one of woman's peculiar duties. In the earlier days of New England, women, as a class, had far fewer opportunities for acquiring learning, yet were far better educated, physically and morally, than now. The high school did not exist; at the common school they learned reading, writing, and arithmetic, and practised spelling; while at home they did the work of the household. They were cheerful, bright, active, ever on the alert, able to do anything, from the harnessing and driving of a horse to the finest embroidery. The daughters of New England in those days looked the world in the face without a fear. They shunned no labor; they were afraid of none; and they could always find their way to a living."

"But although less instructed in school learning," said I, "they showed no deficiency in intellectual acumen. I see no such women, nowadays, as some I remember of that olden time, – women whose strong minds and ever active industry carried on reading and study side by side with household toils.

"I remember a young lady friend of mine, attending a celebrated boarding-school, boarded in the family of a woman who had never been to school longer than was necessary to learn to read and write, yet who was a perfect cyclopedia of general information. The young scholar used to take her Chemistry and Natural Philosophy into the kitchen, where her friend was busy with her household work, and read her lessons to her, that she might have the benefit of her explanations; and so, while the good lady scoured her andirons or kneaded her bread, she lectured to her *protégée* on mysteries of science far beyond the limits of the text-book. Many of the graduates of our modern high schools would find it hard to shine in conversation on the subjects they had studied, in the searching presence of some of these vigorous matrons of the olden time, whose only school had been the leisure hours gained by energy and method from their family cares."

"And in those days," said my wife, "there lived in our families a class of American domestics, women of good sense and good powers of reflection, who applied this sense and power of reflection to household matters. In the early part of my married life, I myself had American 'help'; and they were not only excellent servants, but trusty and invaluable friends. But now, all this class of applicants for domestic service have disappeared, I scarce know why or how. All I know is, there is no more a Betsey or a Lois, such as used to take domestic cares off my shoulders so completely."

"Good heavens! where are they?" cried Bob. "Where do they hide? I would search through the world after such a prodigy!"

"The fact is," said I, "there has been a slow and gradual reaction against household labor in America. Mothers began to feel that it was a sort of *curse*, to be spared, if possible, to their daughters; women began to feel that they were fortunate in proportion as they were able to be entirely clear of family responsibilities. Then Irish labor began to come in, simultaneously with a great advance in female education.

"For a long while nothing was talked of, written of, thought of, in teachers' meetings, conventions, and assemblies, but the neglected state of female education; and the whole circle of the arts and sciences was suddenly introduced into our free-school system, from which needle-work as gradually and quietly was suffered to drop out. The girl who attended the primary and high school had so much study imposed on her that she had no time for sewing or housework; and the delighted mother was only too happy to darn her stockings and do the housework alone, that her daughter might rise to a higher plane than she herself had attained to. The daughter, thus educated, had, on coming to womanhood, no solidity of muscle, no manual dexterity, no practice or experience in domestic life; and if she were to seek a livelihood, there remained only teaching, or some feminine trade, or the factory."

"These factories," said my wife, "have been the ruin of hundreds and hundreds of our once healthy farmers' daughters and others from the country. They go there young and unprotected; they live there in great boarding-houses, and associate with a promiscuous crowd, without even such restraints of maternal supervision as they would have in great boarding-schools; their bodies are enfeebled by labor often necessarily carried on in a foul and heated atmosphere; and at the hours when off duty, they are exposed to all the dangers of unwatched intimacy with the other sex.

"Moreover, the factory-girl learns and practises but one thing, – some one mechanical movement, which gives no scope for invention, ingenuity, or any other of the powers called into play by domestic labor; so that she is in reality unfitted in every way for family duties.

"Many times it has been my lot to try, in my family service, girls who have left factories; and I have found them wholly useless for any of the things which a woman ought to be good for. They knew nothing of a house, or what ought to be done in it; they had imbibed a thorough contempt of household labor, and looked upon it but as a *dernier ressort*; and it was only the very lightest of its tasks that they could even begin to think of. I remember I tried to persuade one of these girls, the pretty daughter of a fisherman, to take some lessons in washing and ironing. She was at that time engaged to be married to a young mechanic, who earned something like two or three dollars a day.

"My child,' said I, 'you will need to understand all kinds of housework, if you are going to be married.'

"She tossed her little head, —

"Indeed, she wasn't going to trouble herself about that.'

"But who will get up your husband's shirts?'

"O, he must put them out. I'm not going to be married to make a slave of myself!'

"Another young factory-girl, who came for table and parlor work, was so full of airs and fine notions, that it seemed as difficult to treat with her as with a princess. She could not sweep, because it blistered her hands, which, in fact, were long and delicate; she could not think of putting them into hot dish-water, and for that reason preferred washing the dishes in cold water; she required a full hour in the morning to make her toilet; she was laced so tightly that she could not stoop without vertigo, and her hoops were of dimensions which seemed to render it impossible for her to wait upon table; she was quite exhausted with the effort of ironing the table-napkins and chamber-towels; — yet she could not think of 'living out' under two dollars a week.

"Both these girls had had a good free-school education, and could read any amount of novels, write a tolerable letter, but had not learned anything with sufficient accuracy to fit them for teachers. They were pretty, and their destiny was to marry and lie a dead weight on the hands of some honest man, and to increase, in their children, the number of incapables."

"Well," said Bob, "what would you have? What is to be done?"

"In the first place," said I, "I would have it felt by those who are seeking to elevate woman, that the work is to be done, not so much by creating for her new spheres of action as by elevating her conceptions of that domestic vocation to which God and Nature have assigned her. It is all very well to open to her avenues of profit and advancement in the great outer world; but, after all, *to make and keep a home* is, and ever must be, a woman's first glory, her highest aim. No work of art can compare with a perfect home; the training and guiding of a family must be recognized as the highest work a woman can perform; and female education ought to be conducted with special reference to this.

"Men are *trained* to be lawyers, to be physicians, to be mechanics, by long and self-denying study and practice. A man cannot even make shoes merely by going to the high school, and learning reading, writing, and mathematics; he cannot be a book-keeper or a printer simply from general education.

"Now women have a sphere and profession of their own, — a profession for which they are fitted by physical organization, by their own instincts, and to which they are directed by the pointing and manifest finger of God, — and that sphere is *family life*.

"Duties to the State and to public life they may have; but the public duties of women must bear to their family ones the same relation that the family duties of men bear to their public ones.

"The defect in the late efforts to push on female education is, that it has been for her merely general, and that it has left out and excluded all that is professional; and she undertakes the essential duties of womanhood, when they do devolve on her, without any adequate preparation."

"But is it possible for a girl to learn at school the things which fit her for family life?" said Bob.

"Why not?" I replied. "Once it was thought impossible in schools to teach girls geometry, or algebra, or the higher mathematics; it was thought impossible to put them through collegiate courses; but it has been done, and we see it. Women study treatises on political economy in schools; and why should not the study of domestic economy form a part of every school course? A young girl will stand up at the blackboard, and draw and explain the compound blowpipe, and describe all the process of making oxygen and hydrogen. Why should she not draw and explain a refrigerator as well as an air-pump? Both are to be explained on philosophical principles. When a school-girl, in her Chemistry, studies the reciprocal action of acids and alkalies, what is there to hinder the teaching her its application to the various processes of cooking where acids and alkalies are employed? Why should she not be led to see how effervescence and fermentation can be made to perform their office in the

preparation of light and digestible bread? Why should she not be taught the chemical substances by which food is often adulterated, and the tests by which such adulterations are detected? Why should she not understand the processes of confectionery, and know how to guard against the deleterious or poisonous elements that are introduced into children's sugar-plums and candies? Why, when she learns the doctrine of *mordants*, the substances by which different colors are set, should she not learn it with some practical view to future life, so that she may know how to set the color of a fading calico or restore the color of a spotted one? Why, in short, when a girl has labored through a profound chemical work, and listened to courses of chemical lectures, should she come to domestic life, which presents a constant series of chemical experiments and changes, and go blindly along as without chart or compass, unable to tell what will take out a stain, or what will brighten a metal, what are common poisons and what their antidotes, and not knowing enough of the laws of caloric to understand how to warm a house, or of the laws of atmosphere to know how to ventilate one? Why should the preparation of food, that subtile art on which life, health, cheerfulness, good temper, and good looks so largely depend, forever be left in the hands of the illiterate and vulgar?

"A benevolent gentleman has lately left a large fortune for the founding of a university for women; and the object is stated to be to give women who have already acquired a general education the means of acquiring a professional one, to fit themselves for some employment by which they may gain a livelihood.

"In this institution the women are to be instructed in book-keeping, stenography, telegraphing, photographing, drawing, modelling, and various other arts; but so far as I remember, there is no proposal to teach domestic economy as at least *one* of woman's professions.

"Why should there not be a professor of domestic economy in every large female school? Why should not this professor give lectures, first on house-planning and building, illustrated by appropriate apparatus? Why should not the pupils have presented to their inspection models of houses planned with reference to economy, to ease of domestic service, to warmth, to ventilation, and to architectural appearance? Why should not the professor go on to lecture further on house-fixtures, with models of the best mangles, washing-machines, clothes-wringers, ranges, furnaces, and cooking-stoves, together with drawings and apparatus illustrative of domestic hydraulics, showing the best contrivances for bathing-rooms and the obvious principles of plumbing, so that the pupils may have some idea how to work the machinery of a convenient house when they have it, and to have such conveniences introduced when wanting? If it is thought worth while to provide, at great expense, apparatus for teaching the revolutions of Saturn's moons and the precession of the equinoxes, why should there not be some also to teach what it may greatly concern a woman's earthly happiness to know?

"Why should not the professor lecture on home-chemistry, devoting his first lecture to bread-making? and why might not a batch of bread be made and baked and exhibited to the class, together with specimens of morbid anatomy in the bread line, – the sour cotton bread of the baker, – the rough, big-holed bread, – the heavy, fossil bread, – the bitter bread of too much yeast, – and the causes of their defects pointed out? And so with regard to the various articles of food, – why might not chemical lectures be given on all of them, one after another? In short, it would be easy to trace out a course of lectures on common things to occupy a whole year, and for which the pupils, whenever they come to have homes of their own, will thank the lecturer to the last day of their life.

"Then there is no impossibility in teaching needle-work, the cutting and fitting of dresses, in female schools. The thing is done very perfectly in English schools for the working classes. A girl trained at one of these schools came into a family I once knew. She brought with her a sewing-book, in which the process of making various articles was exhibited in miniature. The several parts of a shirt were first shown, each perfectly made, and fastened to a leaf of the book by itself, and then the successive steps of uniting the parts, till finally appeared a miniature model of the whole. The sewing was done with red thread, so that every stitch might show, and any imperfection be at once remedied.

The same process was pursued with regard to other garments, and a good general idea of cutting and fitting them was thus given to an entire class of girls.

"In the same manner the care and nursing of young children and the tending of the sick might be made the subject of lectures. Every woman ought to have some general principles to guide her with regard to what is to be done in case of the various accidents that may befall either children or grown people, and of their lesser illnesses, and ought to know how to prepare comforts and nourishment for the sick. Hawthorne's satirical remarks upon the contrast between the elegant Zenobia's conversation and the smoky porridge she made for him when he was an invalid might apply to the volunteer cookery of many charming women."

"I think," said Bob, "that your Professor of Domestic Economy would find enough to occupy his pupils."

"In fact," said I, "were domestic economy properly honored and properly taught, in the manner described, it would open a sphere of employment to so many women in the home life, that we should not be obliged to send our women out to California or the Pacific to put an end to an anxious and aimless life."

"When domestic work is sufficiently honored to be taught as an art and science in our boarding-schools and high schools, then possibly it may acquire also dignity in the eyes of our working classes, and young girls who have to earn their own living may no longer feel degraded in engaging in domestic service. The place of a domestic in a family may become as respectable in their eyes as a place in a factory, in a printing-office, in a dressmaking or millinery establishment, or behind the counter of a shop."

"In America there is no class which will confess itself the lower class, and a thing recommended solely for the benefit of any such class finds no one to receive it."

"If the intelligent and cultivated look down on household work with disdain; if they consider it as degrading, a thing to be shunned by every possible device; they may depend upon it that the influence of such contempt of woman's noble duties will flow downward, producing a like contempt in every class in life."

"Our sovereign princesses learn the doctrine of equality very quickly, and are not going to sacrifice themselves to what is not considered *de bon ton* by the upper classes; and the girl with the laced hat and parasol, without under-clothes, who does her best to 'shirk' her duties as housemaid, and is looking for marriage as an escape from work, is a fair copy of her mistress, who married for much the same reason, who hates housekeeping, and would rather board or do anything else than have the care of a family; – the one is about as respectable as the other."

"When housekeeping becomes an enthusiasm, and its study and practice a fashion, then we shall have in America that class of persons to rely on for help in household labors who are now going to factories, to printing-offices, to every kind of toil, forgetful of the best life and sphere of woman."

III.

A FAMILY-TALK ON RECONSTRUCTION

Our Chimney-Corner, of which we have spoken somewhat, has, besides the wonted domestic circle, its *habitués* who have a frequent seat there. Among these, none is more welcome than Theophilus Thoro.

Friend Theophilus was born on the shady side of Nature, and endowed by his patron saint with every grace and gift which can make a human creature worthy and available, except the gift of seeing the bright side of things. His bead-roll of Christian virtues includes all the graces of the spirit except hope; and so, if one wants to know exactly the flaw, the defect, the doubtful side, and to take into account all the untoward possibilities of any person, place, or thing, he had best apply to friend Theophilus. He can tell you just where and how the best-laid scheme is likely to fail, just the screw that will fall loose in the smoothest-working machinery, just the flaw in the most perfect character, just the defect in the best-written book, just the variety of thorn that must accompany each particular species of rose.

Yet Theophilus is without guile or malice. His want of faith in human nature is not bitter and censorious, but melting and pitiful. "We are all poor trash, miserable dogs together," he seems to say, as he looks out on the world and its ways. There is not much to be expected of or for any of us; but let us love one another, and be patient.

Accordingly, Theophilus is one of the most incessant workers for human good, and perseveringly busy in every scheme of benevolent enterprise, in all which he labors with melancholy steadiness without hope. In religion he has the soul of a martyr, – nothing would suit him better than to be burned alive for his faith; but his belief in the success of Christianity is about on a par with that of the melancholy disciple of old, who, when Christ would go to Judæa, could only say, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Theophilus is always ready to die for the truth and the right, for which he never sees anything but defeat and destruction ahead.

During the late war, Theophilus has been a despairing patriot, dying daily, and giving all up for lost in every reverse from Bull Run to Fredericksburg. The surrender of Richmond and the capitulation of Lee shortened his visage somewhat; but the murder of the President soon brought it back to its old length. It is true, that, while Lincoln lived, he was in a perpetual state of dissent from all his measures. He had broken his heart for years over the miseries of the slaves, but he shuddered at the Emancipation Proclamation; a whirlwind of anarchy was about to sweep over the country, in which the black and the white would dash against each other, and be shivered like potters' vessels. He was in despair at the accession of Johnson, – believing the worst of the unfavorable reports that clouded his reputation. Nevertheless, he was among the first of loyal citizens to rally to the support of the new administration, because, though he had no hope in that, he could see nothing better.

You must not infer from all this that friend Theophilus is a social wet blanket, a goblin shadow at the domestic hearth. By no means. Nature has gifted him with that vein of humor and that impulse to friendly joviality which are frequent developments in sad-natured men, and often deceive superficial observers as to their real character. He who laughs well and makes you laugh is often called a man of cheerful disposition; yet in many cases nothing can be further from it than precisely this kind of person.

Theophilus frequents our chimney-corner, perhaps because Mrs. Crowfield and myself are, so to speak, children of the light and the day. My wife has precisely the opposite talent to that of our friend. She can discover the good point, the sound spot, where others see only defect and corruption. I myself am somewhat sanguine, and prone rather to expect good than evil, and with a vast stock of faith in the excellent things that may turn up in the future. The Millennium is one of the prime articles

of my creed; and all the ups and downs of society I regard only as so many jolts on a very rough road that is taking the world on, through many upsets and disasters, to that final consummation.

Theophilus holds the same belief, theoretically; but it is apt to sink so far out of sight in the mire of present disaster as to be of very little comfort to him.

"Yes," he said, "we are going to ruin, in my view, about as fast as we can go. Miss Jennie, I will trouble you for another small lump of sugar in my tea."

"You have been saying that, about our going to ruin, every time you have taken tea here for four years past," said Jennie; "but I always noticed that your fears never spoiled your relish either for tea or muffins. People talk about being on the brink of a volcano, and the country going to destruction, and all that, just as they put pepper on their potatoes; it is an agreeable stimulant in conversation, – that's all."

"For my part," said my wife, "I can speak in another vein. When had we ever in all our history so *bright* prospects, so much to be thankful for? Slavery is abolished; the last stain of disgrace is wiped from our national honor. We stand now before the world self-consistent with our principles. We have come out of one of the severest struggles that ever tried a nation, purer and stronger in morals and religion, as well as more prosperous in material things."

"My dear madam, excuse me," said Theophilus; "but I cannot help being reminded of what an English reviewer once said, – that a lady's facts have as much poetry in them as Tom Moore's lyrics. Of course poetry is always agreeable, even though of no statistical value."

"I see no poetry in my facts," said Mrs. Crowfield. "Is not slavery forever abolished, by the confession of its best friends, – even of those who declare its abolition a misfortune, and themselves ruined in consequence?"

"I confess, my dear madam, that we have succeeded as we human creatures commonly do, in supposing that we have destroyed an evil, when we have only changed its name. We have contrived to withdraw from the slave just that fiction of property relation which made it for the interest of some one to care for him a little, however imperfectly; and having destroyed that, we turn him out defenceless to shift for himself in a community every member of which is imbittered against him. The whole South resounds with the outcries of slaves suffering the vindictive wrath of former masters; laws are being passed hunting them out of this State and out of that; the animosity of race – at all times the most bitter and unreasonable of animosities – is being aroused all over the land. And the Free States take the lead in injustice to them. Witness a late vote of Connecticut on the suffrage question. The efforts of government to protect the rights of these poor defenceless creatures are about as energetic as such efforts always have been and always will be while human nature remains what it is. For a while the obvious rights of the weaker party will be confessed, with some show of consideration, in public speeches; they will be paraded by philanthropic sentimentalists, to give point to their eloquence; they will be here and there sustained in governmental measures, when there is no strong temptation to the contrary, and nothing better to be done; but the moment that political combinations begin to be formed, all the rights and interests of this helpless people will be bandied about as so, many make-weights in the political scale. Any troublesome lion will have a negro thrown to him to keep him quiet. All their hopes will be dashed to the ground by the imperious Southern white, no longer feeling for them even the interest of a master, and regarding them with a mixture of hatred and loathing as the cause of all his reverses. Then if, driven to despair, they seek to defend themselves by force, they will be crushed by the power of the government, and ground to powder, as the weak have always been under the heel of the strong.

"So much for our abolition of slavery. As to our material prosperity, it consists of an inflated paper currency, an immense debt, a giddy, foolhardy spirit of speculation and stock-gambling, and a perfect furor of extravagance, which is driving everybody to live beyond his means, and casting contempt on the republican virtues of simplicity and economy.

"As to advancement in morals, there never was so much intemperance in our people before, and the papers are full of accounts of frauds, defalcations, forgeries, robberies, assassinations, and arsons. Against this tide of corruption the various organized denominations of religion do nothing effectual. They are an army shut up within their own intrenchments, holding their own with difficulty, and in no situation to turn back the furious assaults of the enemy."

"In short," said Jennie, "according to your showing, the whole country is going to destruction. Now, if things really are so bad, if you really believe all you have been saying, you ought not to be sitting drinking your tea as you are now, or to have spent the afternoon playing croquet with us girls; you ought to gird yourself with sackcloth, and go up and down the land, raising the alarm, and saying, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.'"

"Well," said Theophilus, while a covert smile played about his lips, "you know the saying, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow,' etc. Things are not yet *gone* to destruction, only *going*, – and why not have a good time on deck before the ship goes to pieces? Your chimney-corner is a tranquil island in the ocean of trouble, and your muffins are absolutely perfect. I'll take another, if you'll please to pass them."

"I've a great mind *not* to pass them," said Jennie. "Are you in earnest in what you are saying? or are you only saying it for sensation? How *can* people believe such things and be comfortable? *I* could not. If I believed all you have been saying I could not sleep nights, – I should be perfectly miserable; and *you* cannot really believe all this, or you would be."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Crowfield, "our friend's picture is the truth painted with all its shadows and none of its lights. All the dangers he speaks of are real and great, but he omits the counterbalancing good. Let *me* speak now. There never has been a time in our history when so many honest and just men held power in our land as now, – never a government before in which the public councils recognized with more respect the just and the right. There never was an instance of a powerful government showing more tenderness in the protection of a weak and defenceless race than ours has shown in the care of the freedmen hitherto. There never was a case in which the people of a country were more willing to give money and time and disinterested labor to raise and educate those who have thus been thrown on their care. Considering that we have had a great, harassing, and expensive war on our hands, I think the amount done by government and individuals for the freedmen unequalled in the history of nations; and I do not know why it should be predicted from this past fact, that, in the future, both government and people are about to throw them to the lions, as Mr. Theophilus supposes. Let us wait, at least, and see. So long as government maintains a freedmen's bureau, administered by men of such high moral character, we must think, at all events, that there are strong indications in the right direction. Just think of the immense advance of public opinion within four years, and of the grand successive steps of this advance, – Emancipation in the District of Columbia, the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, the General Emancipation Act, the Amendment of the Constitution. All these do not look as if the black were about to be ground to powder beneath the heel of the white. If the negroes are oppressed in the South, they can emigrate; no laws hold them; active, industrious laborers will soon find openings in any part of the Union."

"No," said Theophilus, "there will be black laws like those of Illinois and Tennessee, there will be turbulent uprisings of the Irish, excited by political demagogues, that will bar them out of Northern States. Besides, as a class, they *will* be idle and worthless. It will not be their fault, but it will be the result of their slave education. All their past observation of their masters has taught them that liberty means licensed laziness, that work means degradation, – and therefore they will loathe work, and cherish laziness as the sign of liberty. 'Am not I free? Have I not as good a right to do nothing as you?' will be the cry."

"Already the lazy whites, who never lifted a hand in any useful employment, begin to raise the cry that 'niggers won't work'; and I suspect the cry may not be without reason. Industrious citizens can never be made in a community where the higher class think useful labor a disgrace. The whites

will oppose the negro in every effort to rise; they will debar him of every civil and social right; they will set him the worst possible example, as they have been doing for hundreds of years; and then they will hound and hiss at him for being what they made him. This is the old track of the world, – the good, broad, reputable road on which all aristocracies and privileged classes have been always travelling; and it's not likely that we shall have much of a secession from it. The Millennium isn't so near us as that, by a great deal."

"It's all very well arguing from human selfishness and human sin in that way," said I; "but you can't take up a newspaper that doesn't contain abundant facts to the contrary. Here, now," – and I turned to the Tribune, – "is one item that fell under my eye accidentally, as you were speaking: —

"The Superintendent of Freedmen's Affairs in Louisiana, in making up his last Annual Report, says he has 1,952 blacks settled temporarily on 9,650 acres of land, who last year raised crops to the value of \$175,000, and that he had but few worthless blacks under his care; and that, as a class, the blacks have fewer vagrants than can be found among any other class of persons.'

"Such testimonies gem the newspapers like stars."

"Newspapers of your way of thinking, very likely," said Theophilus; "but if it comes to statistics, I can bring counter-statements, numerous and dire, from scores of Southern papers, of vagrancy, laziness, improvidence, and wretchedness."

"Probably both are true," said I, "according to the greater or less care which has been taken of the blacks in different regions. Left to themselves, they tend downward, pressed down by the whole weight of semi-barbarous white society; but when the free North protects and guides, the results are as you see."

"And do you think the free North has salt enough in it to save this whole Southern mass from corruption? I wish I could think so; but all I can see in the free North at present is a raging, tearing, headlong chase after *money*. Now money is of significance only as it gives people the power of expressing their ideal of life. And what does this ideal prove to be among us? Is it not to ape all the splendors and vices of old aristocratic society? Is it not to be able to live in idleness, without useful employment, a life of glitter and flutter and show? What do our New York dames of fashion seek after? To avoid family care, to find servants at any price who will relieve them of home responsibilities, and take charge of their houses and children while they shine at ball and opera, and drive in the park. And the servants who learn of these mistresses, – what do they seek after? *They* seek also to get rid of care, to live as nearly as possible without work, to dress and shine in their secondary sphere, as the mistresses do in the primary one. High wages with little work and plenty of company express Bidley's ideal of life, which is a little more respectable than that of her mistress, who wants high wages with no work. The house and the children are not Bidley's; and why should she care more for their well-being than the mistress and the mother?

"Hence come wranglings and moanings. Bidley uses a chest of tea in three months, and the amount of the butcher's bill is fabulous; Jane gives the baby laudanum to quiet it, while she slips out to *her* parties; and the upper classes are shocked at the demoralized state of the Irish, their utter want of faithfulness and moral principle! How dreadful that there are no people who enjoy the self-denials and the cares which they dislike, that there are no people who rejoice in carrying that burden of duties which they do not wish to touch with one of their fingers! The outcry about the badness of servants means just this: that everybody is tired of self-helpfulness, – the servants as thoroughly as the masters and mistresses. All want the cream of life, without even the trouble of skimming; and the great fight now is, who shall drink the skim-milk, which nobody wants. *Work*

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