

HALF AN HOUR IN A SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICE.

Having occasion recently to repair, by appointment, to one of those places which have of late become quite "institutions" in this country, a "Servants' Registry Office," I was let in for half an hour's entertainment in what passed within my hearing, though it presented probably but a sample of the daily proceedings in an establishment of the kind.

I had come to meet a young person whose services I was anxious to secure from the strong terms in which she had been recommended to me; but as I was before the time appointed, and she was considerably after, I was placed in the position of an unintentional witness of what transpired in the interval.

Let me, first of all, observe that the "office" in question was kept by a female, a married woman of well-merited reputation for respectability and judgment, who had now been doing business for years in that line, and, it was said, had made a good thing of it. She had her stated hours for business, and did nothing else. Formerly she had kept a shop, a greengrocer's, or a small scale, carrying on the two businesses together; but she found that the two lines did not somehow suit one another; that the supplying her customers with apples and cabbages interfered so with her "domestic" transactions that, favoring no doubt the one that was most lucrative, she disposed of her stock-in-trade, converted her shop into what she termed her office, with an ante or waiting-room, pulled down the old sign-board, and replaced it by another which proclaimed to the passing world, in gilt and blue, that the undivided attention of the proprietress was devoted to her "registry."

She was a person eminently adapted for the calling she had selected. In her dress she was faultlessly neat and simple. Never did you see upon her—at least in business hours—so much as a superfluous bit of ribbon, far less anything approaching the gay or flashy. Her manner, without being dry, was thoroughly business like and the same to all her customers. Whether it were peevish or poor creature's wife, whether it were the employer of a dozen servants or only of one of all work, she preserved consistently the same civil demeanor to every one, so that all came away with a correspondingly good opinion of Mrs. Primworthy.

The young woman whom I expected not having arrived, Mrs. Primworthy begged that I would take a seat in the ante-room already referred to, which accordingly I did, hoping, as I did so, that my detention might not be long.

This apartment evidently served as Mrs. Primworthy's sitting-room, when she was not pursuing her professional avocations. There was a convenient dividing wall through which, when seated, you could take a panoramic view of the so-called office. This intermediate window had been left open; so that not only could I see, if I wished, those in the next room, but I could also hear—in fact I could not help hearing—their conversation.

Having accordingly taken a chair, I readily accepted also the offer of a newspaper, and for a few moments it engaged my attention; but I soon found reading to be impossible, owing to the distractions of the adjacent audience chamber, so I gave up the attempt.

My attention was first drawn on to the arrival of a lady in her carriage and pair, who, having alighted, proceeded to relate to Mrs. Primworthy her pitiable case. Her countenance, I fancied, bore a look of harassment; and as I heard her disclose the plight that she was in, I certainly did not wonder that she should evince something like anxiety.

"Well, Mrs. Primworthy," she began, "I am in great trouble. My servants are all leaving me, and I cannot imagine the reason why. When I say all I mean all excepting my cook, who came to me about a fortnight ago, that she would stay, for really she is invaluable. But all the rest have given me notice, and that within a day or two of one another. They seem, without any cause, to have taken a whim into their heads to leave me in less than a month from now. I feel it so I cannot tell you. When I think of the ingratitude of their behavior, to say nothing of the perplexity they have placed me in, it almost overcomes me; and then we have visitors coming to stay with us. Oh, Mrs. Primworthy, I am quite bewildered at the prospect."

"Well, ma'am, I'm exceedingly sorry to hear it; but you surely don't mean to say that all your servants have given you notice?—Yes, indeed I do. Now you know our old nurse who has been with us for years, and who, I supposed, was so attached to the family that she could not have endured the thought of leaving us. Well, she was the very first, positively, to give me notice. That I thought bad enough. Then, one by one, the others followed her example. My lady's maid, who suits me to a nicety, and my housemaid, and even that steady young man Jones, whom I was so thankful to you for finding for me, he says he must seek another situation too."

"It is certainly very trying, ma'am, isn't it? I wonder whatever can be the cause of it all. Has there been nothing unpleasant with them that you can think of, ma'am? Servants are really getting so high and mighty in their notions now, that they'll scarce bear being spoken to." "Oh, dear, no. There has been no occasion even for fault-finding lately. And it seems so strange, they all say they are so sorry to go, and speaking of the kindness of their master and mistress, yet they cannot think of staying. I have questioned them, and entreated them to tell me what is the matter; but the only answer I can get is:—'Things is not as they used to be.' But I am not aware of any change. We treat them exactly the same as we always have and they have no complaints to make. I have only one comfort amidst it all, and that is my new cook, who is the best I think I have ever had. I wish she is quite comfortable, and has expressed no wish to leave me. She tells me also she has known of servants elsewhere being seized with a similar freak, and all giving notice together. I think she said in one of the places where she was before they all did so one morning. But it is fortunate she is not going too, it is not, Mrs. Primworthy?"

But Mrs. Primworthy, I noticed, made no answer to this remark; and a peculiar look she put on made me fancy some suspicion had occurred to her. "Do you know, ma'am," she replied, "I should much like to talk a bit to your footman Jones. He knows me well, and I will reason with him, and tell him what I think of his conduct. It can do no harm, ma'am."

"Oh, you are quite at liberty to do so; but I am sure it will be no sort of use. Foolish fellow, he is quite as much resolved to be gone as any of them. You may try what you can do. Here, Jones," said the lady, stooping forward to beckon the man in.

"Excuse me, ma'am," interposed Mrs. Primworthy, "I must ask you to be so kind as to step into the next room, as I think he won't like speaking out before you; so if you don't mind, ma'am, just taking a seat in here—" (opening the door of the room I was in.)

Mrs. Primworthy did not finish her sentence, but showed the lady in, closing the door again, summoned Jones into her presence.

When I felt by no means comfortable on being discovered in my retreat, especially when its facilities for overhearing became apparent. The lady evinced a little surprise at seeing me, and perhaps felt something more; but we both remained seated, still and silent, listening to the conversation between the footman and the registress. And now we had an opportunity of admiring the shrewd tact of Mrs. Primworthy. Instead of opening a direct fire upon the man with the straightforward inquiry why it was he had given notice, she adopted the masterly flank movement of expressing a deep interest in the cook who had lately left the place, and after enumerating her various excellencies, all of which Jones endorsed to the full, she observed:—

"Yes, indeed, she was what we may call a good servant, and no mistake; and what's more, she was a comfortable sort of a person to live with; and I'm quite certain, Jones, if she'd remained you never would have wanted to leave the same as you are."

"No, mum, nor none on us wouldn't, and so that's the truth," admitted Jones, falling at once into the trap.

"It makes such a deal of difference, doesn't it, Jones, when a cook makes things agreeable in the kitchen. I know it was so. Servants as has a kind master and mistress don't all give warning that way without there being a cause for it."

"That they don't, mum, and according to my notions servants do ought to be all of an equality like, and not one set over the rest on. It makes a place beyond all bearing, that it do."

I stole a glance across at the lady, and it was really painful to witness the evident discomfort which this observation of the footman occasioned her. She started as if to rise from her chair and stop further discussion; but on Mrs. Primworthy resuming, she sat still.

"And then, Jones," added the latter, "I've always found when a cook do treat her fellow-servants bad, it's a thing she can't be cured of, so it isn't any use arguing with her on it."

"That's just where it is, mum; and as I says, 'tain't no good any on us a tryin' to remain. Her temper be so bad, and she be that there violent, as no one can't bide in sight of her. I'm sure I've always wished to live peaceable like with every one; but that there woman she won't leave none on us alone. 'Bis her natur, I expects; and so sometimes she'll be abusin' us, sometimes 't'other, and sometimes abusin' us all round. Such a time as I've had these here last ten days! I'd sooner list for a soldier. I'd sooner—"

Here Mrs. Primworthy interrupted him. "Your mistress is sadly put about, Jones. Don't you think you could manage to stay on till she was suited? and you might have more time, perhaps, to look out for a good place."

"No, mum; I'm very sorry for missus, but I couldn't stay; I believe as it would be the death o' me. I was going to say as I'd sooner break stones from mornin' to night, and get my vittles where I could, than I'd bide in a place where that there woman was. If we was a lot of dogs, she could not treat us no worse nor she do. 'Taint me only, either; every one as comes to the kitchen catches it from her just the same. If it's the baker or the grocer's man, she do fly at 'em as if she was a tiger, axing them what brings 'em there, and such like, till some on 'em declares as they won't come no more. 'Twas only last night as the butcher's boy said some one else might come for orders, 'cos he shouldn't come again. Never did see such a woman in all my life; she must be abusin' or a scolding summat. Why, one day, if she didn't take me, beat the poor cat with the bastin' spoon, 'cos she happened to come nigh the hastener when she was a roastin', till the poor animal went limp'n' off under the dresser."

The amazement and consternation of the lady, which had been fast fermenting, here reached a climax, and completely got the better of her. Unable to sit quiet any longer, she quickly rose from her chair, and, presenting herself again in the office, put an end to the discussion.

The appearance of his mistress Jones took as a signal for him to withdraw; whereupon the lady recommenced.

"Well, Mrs. Primworthy, I have overheard all. I really do not know how I feel! I am amazed! I am mortified, too. How I have been taken in with that woman! To me she is perfectly respectable, appearing to know her place most thoroughly; and yet amongst the servants she must be a regular virago. Still, I feel relieved greatly, disappointed though I am. I am sure I have to thank you for the way in which you elicited the truth from Jones, and really you deserve credit for being so clever."

Mrs. Primworthy smiled, with a look of modest satisfaction, and replied:—

"Why, ma'am, when you told me what the cook had said to you, I suspected at once what was the matter."

"Well, I say, I think it was very clever of you. But I am greatly to blame; for, do you know, I entirely forgot to make any inquiry respecting the woman's temper; so I am justly punished for my own stupid forgetfulness."

"Well, ma'am, I don't know. You might not perhaps have heard the truth, even if you had made that inquiry. You see, some mistresses makes it a sort of rule never to say a single word to harm a servant that applies to a single word to harm a servant that applies to them for a character; and I know one lady, for example, who, though she has had really all sorts in service, gives the same character to every one. They are all good-tempered, all cleanly, all sober, and so on; when I know, as a fact, some of them have been quite different. And then, you see, ma'am, this woman is a knowing one; she never shows her temper to you; most likely, if former mistresses have found her like you have, quite civil and respectful, though in other kitchens she has gone on as she has in yours. It is seldom, too, we can get servants to speak out of one another. I assure you, ma'am, they'll leave a good place sooner. I don't know when I've heard one speak out like that footman of yours did; and it is a great pity they don't; for how are you or I to know—how's any one to know—the real characters, when there's an agreement like to keep the truth back from us? I suppose, ma'am, you intend giving the cook notice?"

"Indeed I shall," replied the lady. "I shall hurry home, and give her warning at once; and I do hope, by doing so, I shall get my other servants to stop on. Do you think they will, Mrs. Primworthy?"

"Really, ma'am, I hope they may, but I cannot undertake to say. Servants has got such queer obstinate notions sometimes. But I think if you can send the cook away, without letting her fancy any one has been telling of her, it is the best thing you can do, ma'am."

"Good morning, then, Mrs. Primworthy; I must hurry home. I shall call again to-morrow; for in any case you will have to help me."

I only trust that it may be one servant, and not five, that I shall require you to find for me."

The lady now re-entered her carriage, and the footman closed the door after her. Before, however, driving away, she seemed to have remembered something more, for Jones was sent back with a message relative to the hour of the morning's visit, having delivered which, the man seized the opportunity of adding just a word, as if in self-justification:—

"You see, mum, we never likes tellin' on one another; but when a woman like that cook do forget herself, and come to treat her fellow-servants as if they were all her inferiors, why then, I don't think the likes of her don't deserve no consideration, but only to be treated accordin'."

"Quite right, Jones; you need never mind telling the real truth in such a case as that."

There was now a short pause; Mrs. Primworthy taking advantage of the vacant interval to put on her spectacles and cast her eye through a handful of papers which she drew from her desk. Thinks I to myself, as I glanced over the interview just concluded, such, I dare say, is but a revelation of what takes place frequently in a kitchen, without ever reaching the ear of master or mistress. Probably many a mysterious warning, which has sorely perplexed the head of an establishment, is traceable to some such cause as that just divulged. While other reasons are alleged, the truth is that there is some cross-grained, cantankerous spirit below stairs, who emits her kitchen life to one, if not more of its occupants, till further endurance of it becomes unbearable.

I was about to resume my newspaper, when a second lady stepped in by appointment, like myself, to meet a young woman who, fortunately for her, was already awaiting her arrival in another "Salle d'Attente," and had only to be summoned. One glance at the lady convinced me that, although she might be mistress of an establishment, she was not blessed with a family. That somewhat antipathetic countenance, that rather short adhesive skirt, which evidently gave shelter to no crinoline, and that quaintly pinned shawl, all conspired to bespeak unmistakably the old maid. She spoke deliberately, yet somewhat determinedly; her features seemed to take no interest in the remarks that escaped her, appearing incapable of evincing pleasure, pain, or animation.

"You see," she began, with a slowness bordering on solemnity, that would almost justify the following specimen of punctuation, "Mrs. Primworthy; I require, a person, of more than ordinary respectability. Situated, as I am; and there being only females, in my house; it is necessary to avoid, the slightest cause, for scandal; or even, remark. You know, I keep, but the two. I require them, of no account, as myself, in every way."

"Of course, ma'am, naturally you do," replied the ever-acknowledging Mrs. Primworthy, probably thinking all the while she did not see very respectable attendants were more indispensable in the case of this unprotected female than with anybody else, and adding, "Perhaps you'll allow me to call the young woman, as she is waiting, and then you can speak to her yourself."

The summons resulted in the entrance of a good-looking girl of about two-and-twenty; well, but certainly not gaily dressed, whose bright eyes and animated look presented a marked contrast with the unimpassioned aspect of her possible future mistress. Scarcely possible, too, thought I; surely this cautious maiden lady seeks something far more demure than this dame. The girl having dropped a propitiatory curtsy, the lady commenced as follows, each word weighed with consistent deliberation:—

"You have been in service before, I understand?"

"Yes, ma'am; I was housemaid and parlour-maid at my last place."

"What sort of a place was it—a quiet place?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; 'twas a very quiet place, and very little company."

"Did they keep any men servants there?"

A decided stress upon that awful word of three letters being perceptible.

"No, ma'am, they didn't keep no man servants. They had used to keep a footman afore I came; but as I could wait at table, master said as he shouldn't want a man no more."

"And did you and the cook do all the work of the house?"

"Net quite all, we didn't, ma'am. There was, besides us two, a boy as used to clean the boots and knives, and run of an errand, and sometimes help wait at table."

"Oh, indeed! there was a boy, was there?—and pray what age was the boy?"

"Well, ma'am, I think he said as he was just turned sixteen."

"As man as that? Was he a big boy or a little boy because, you know, some boys at sixteen are almost men, and quite as objectionable."

At this the girl could not suppress a smile, nor could I; not in the least disconcerted, however, she replied:—

"Why, he wasn't very big nor yet very little, but I never knowed as there was ever anything against the boy."

Despairing, I conclude, of eliciting further information touching this interesting youth of sixteen, the lady, who, I noticed, had been scrutinizing this young woman's attire from head to foot, next went into the matter of dress, on which subject she appeared to hold decided views.

"In case of your entering my service, I must tell you I should require you to dress very simply."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, certainly. I've always been 'customed to dress plain."

"Yes, but," resumed the lady, "I cannot say I consider your dress to-day at all suited to a servant."

As I glanced at the girl's clothing, I confess I could discover nothing with which even a fastidious mistress could find fault. The bonnet certainly was trimmed with broad green ribbon, and the gown, a clean print, appeared to owe its expansion to one of those contrivances held evidently in virtuous horror by her punctilious critic.

"Yes, ma'am, I've always been used to wear a cap."

"I wonder whether it is what I should call a cap. Some servants of mine have told me before I engaged them that they wore caps, but on coming to me they have had nothing on their heads but a tiny bit of net which you could not even see unless you stood behind them. Before engaging you, I think I should like to see one of your caps."

"Very well, ma'am."

"You tell me you have been accustomed to open the door. I hope your manner to visitors is respectful and modest, especially when a gentleman calls. I have not many gentlemen visitors; but you know, to a gentleman you cannot be too guarded and reserved in your manner. Never say a word more than you can help, and never be seen to smile or look pleased as some servants do."

The next inquiry on the part of the lady had reference to her leaving her last place—the reason why. To which the girl with, as I thought, great candor, gave an answer well-fitted to her present prospect of engagement.

"Well, ma'am, missus always said as she was quite satisfied with the way I did my work, and I shouldn't have had to leave only she thought as I had an acquaintance."

"An acquaintance, ma'am?"

"An acquaintance!" exclaimed the maiden lady, her hitherto inflexible features being for the first time summoned to participate in the horrified amazement with which the disclosure was received—"an acquaintance! Oh, I do not wonder that you should have had notice. I never would keep a servant in my house who was capable of such an impropriety. A place soon loses its name for respectability if acquaintances are tolerated."

"But, if you please, ma'am," replied the young woman, "it wasn't true, only missus suspected so."

Altho' I should be afraid she had some ground for her suspicion. Servants are so foolish. They require so much watching to keep them proper and respectable, that it causes ladies a great deal of trouble and anxiety. It shall never be said that I fall to look after mine. Even on the Sunday, when they must of course go to church, I keep them within my own observation. I always make them walk close behind me and sit near my pew where I can see them, so that no one can even speak to them without my being aware of it; besides that, I consider it my duty to see all the letters that my servants receive, so as to prevent anything like an improper correspondence."

On the disclosure of so complete a system of espionage, the idea seemed to occur to the young woman that the situation might not be quite so desirable as she had supposed, and for the first time there were symptoms of non-acquiescence in the lady's mode of dealing with her domestics; so she replied, still quite respectfully:—

"Please, ma'am, I've always been used to have an hour or two to myself of Sunday afternoon, and I ain't never been 'customed to show anybody the letters as I gets."

"Well, I could not alter my rules for any servant. I only act in accordance with what I conceive to be my duty. If you think my ways too strict, you had better not think of my place."

There was a few moments' pause, during which the girl looked down, as if to collect from off the floor her thoughts, or words wherein to express them, the result being, as I anticipated, her final answer:—

"I'm 'most afeard, ma'am, I shouldn't give you satisfaction."

An exchange of "good mornings" now terminated this interesting though abortive interview; and Mrs. Primworthy and the lady being left in sole occupation of the office, the latter recommenced:—

"Scarcely thought that person would answer for me when she came into your office. She is evidently fond of dress, and altogether there is a style about her that I do not like in a servant."

"Well, ma'am," replied Mrs. Primworthy, "as regards the matter of dress, why you see, ma'am, servants is apt to get a bit dressy nowadays, and to tell the truth, ma'am, I shouldn't have considered that girl at all gaily dressed as the times go. Things is a good deal changed now in comparison as they used to be; and the fact is, you can't get servants to dress themselves the same as they did twenty or thirty years ago, with large caps tied under the chin and bonnets with scarcely any ribbon, and short skippy skirts and such like. The times is altered, and we shan't have servants the same as they used to be never again no more. Besides, ma'am, mistresses is so different. I know some that takes a sort of pride in the appearance of their servants, and wouldn't have them dressed in the old-fashioned style on no account whatever."

"How strange that does seem! I perhaps you had better try and find me a more elderly person. Have you any one on your list at present who you think would suit me?"

"No, ma'am, not at present, I'm sorry to say, no one at all; and I'm really afraid I shall have some difficulty in meeting with the kind of person you require."

"So I should fancy," soliloquized I, as on the departure of this model mistress I indulged in speculations as to whence the good lady had derived her notions of "domestic" treatment; whether she had herself in earlier years been subjected to anything correspondent in the way of supervision and restraint, and whether, if so, how it had answered in her own case. Whether, for example, pains had been taken to impress upon her youthful mind the impropriety of possessing an "acquaintance," and all such objectionable superstitious had been judiciously kept aloof. Who knows but what her present freedom from marital encumbrance may be due to the successful adoption of this system? She may perhaps owe her state of blissful celibacy to the laudable intervention of parents or others who checked every tendency to cultivate an acquaintance, and, thanks to their efforts, she remains to her own continued fervor in the doubts whether the plan on which this respected lady acted was the right one. I could not bring myself to see the propriety of treating servants like young school-girls, to say nothing of the practicable impossibility of doing so. It is, no doubt, a great nuisance to know that one or more young men are hovering over an equal number of your female attendants, and a still greater one when, on the ripening of the acquaintance into something more, a good servant like Betsy takes herself off "for better for worse," leaving you as good as cookless, or nurseless, or house-maidless; and it is not to be wondered at if, after such painful experience, the mistress of a house should insert a clause in her resolutions prohibiting henceforth all followers; this does not answer, nor ever will while the law of nature continues against it; and so singular am I, that I now prefer engaging a servant who has a respectable well-defined Joseph on the horizon with whom she is permitted to "keep company" at intervals, rather than a young woman who, I know, will be on the watch to take in to her the Dick, Tom, or Harry—perhaps all three—whom she may succeed in signaling."

But the time was passing, and my young woman had not come. Weary of waiting, I rose to depart, when Mrs. Primworthy, knowing I had come some distance, prevailed upon me to "wait a little longer." I was about to speak to her about the person whom the maiden lady had sent adrift, and who, I thought, might have suited me, when she was again summoned back to her office. A young man, with light hair and fair complexion, about five-and-twenty, well got-up in a suit of light-colored garments and an Albert chain dangling gracefully from a buttonhole, had come to transact business with the accommodating Mrs. Primworthy. He has come in quest of a valet de chambre, was my conclusion; or, maybe, he is a married man and is deputed by his wife to negotiate for some female servant or other. It was then with unfeigned surprise that I heard Mrs. Primworthy address him familiarly as "Thomas," inquiring interestedly, at the same time, after his parents and family. Greater still was my amazement when, on proceeding to business, I heard the question asked him, "What made you leave your last situation?"

Yes, indeed, however hard to credit it, this was a footman out of place! He had come to see if Mrs. Primworthy could find him another berth.

"Why did I leave my last situation?" he answered, echoing Mrs. Primworthy's question—"I left it because my feelings would not allow me to remain any longer; and when you hear all particulars, you'll only wonder how I put up with it so long."

"Indeed, Thomas, I'm sorry to hear that. Let me see—you was only there four months—was not that all?"

"Six months, Mrs. Primworthy, such a six months as I hope never to pass in any other situation, and I'll take care I don't if I can help it. Why, they don't know to treat a respectable man; and then, the things I was expected to do there, brings up all my indignation to think of them. First of all, I wasn't even given a room to myself, but was forced to share a bedroom with the groom, a common fellow who used to snore so loud I had to be awake for hours listening to him. To think of this, after what I had been accustomed to! and then, this low chap, he knew so little of his place, and all that was due to me, that he refused to clean my boots the very first morning after I came, saying I was just as much a servant as he was; so that I had actually to do my own boot cleaning during the whole of those blessed six months."

"Well, but, Thomas, I don't think such little annoyances as those sufficient cause for leaving a good situation?"

"You wouldn't call it a good situation if you knew all the rest that had to put up with. A good situation, indeed! First of all, I wasn't told it was before I went there. I expected they were good stylish sort of people, who knew what a man in my position would, and what he would not, stand. Such unfeeling hours, too, as they kept I never heard of before! If they didn't breakfast at 8 o'clock, and then expect me to be all dressed and ready to attend table at such a time of day as that. Of course I told them at once I couldn't do it; they must get the parlor maid to wait at breakfast, and answer the bells, too, and not expect me anywhere upstairs till after 12 o'clock."

"That was making rather bold, I think, Thomas. You'll find very few places indeed where you'll be left to yourself till twelve in the day."

"Well, Mrs. Primworthy, that is my resolution, and I intend keeping to it. They're required nothing more at my former situation, because they knew better what a man like me was entitled to. But there was lots of other things they wanted me to submit to. When I engaged for the place, it was understood that I should have a suit of clothes at the end of every six months, making two suits in the year; but after I had been there about two months, the gentlemen sends for me, and says he, 'Thomas, there are two suits of clothes of mine on the drawers in my dressing-room which you can have; they are not all worn out; take and get them altered to fit you, as they are well worth it.' I felt my pride hurt at this, and no wonder, and so says I to him, 'No, sir, I'm much obliged to you, I don't wear other people's cast-off clothing, but I don't mind carrying them down stairs and giving them to Bill the groom. I dare say they will be useful to him, and perhaps he won't mind wearing them as they are, without even altering!'"

And what do you think Mr. — says to me because I mentioned this about Bill and the old clothes? Why, he calls me an insolent fellow, and tells me to be off down stairs. So, when my time was up, at the end of the six months, I was dismissed, my wages right enough, and quite naturally I looked at the suit of clothes according to agreement; thinking how nice it would be for me to have some good new things to come away with, when Mr. — turns and begins abusing me like anything, saying he had done more than ever he was bound to do in offering me those old things of his, so I shouldn't get anything more out of him, and it was no use for me trying to. If that wasn't behaving shabby!"

"I think, Thomas," interposed Mrs. Primworthy, "you was wrong in refusing the clothes. Perhaps if it was not specified that the clothes should be new ones, Mr. — considered he was acting up to the terms he engaged you on in offering you what he did. I know Mr. — has always been represented to me as a thorough gentleman, and the last young man as was there said it was a nice comfortable place, and he was so to leave. To tell you the truth, Thomas, I'm afraid you was a little bit spoiled, as the saying is, at the place where you was before."

"Well, you do astonish me to think how any man of proper feelings could call that a comfortable place; but it showed the sort of men they had before me when they had actually been in the habit of carrying the coals upstairs. They tried this on with me when first I came, expecting I was going to carry the coals up great quantities of coals a day all the way from the drawing up to the drawing-room. But, as I told them, my hands are not made for that sort of work; and what's more, I understood my place much to well to submit to it if they had been. I never made any objection to lift the coals on to the fire when the coal box stood ready beside the chimney-piece, so as to save the ladies the trouble; and as I was anxious to be accommodating, I told them if they would get a sort of coal cupboard built on the landing outside the drawing-room door, as they did, to hold two or three days' coal, I shouldn't even make a difficulty about filling the coal box from there; but as to carrying the coal up-stairs, I shouldn't do it."

"And did they actually let you off carrying the coals?" inquired the astonished Mrs. Primworthy, becoming, like myself, more and more amazed at Thomas' presumption. "If they did, I think you were treated with great indulgence there altogether."

"Indulgence!" exclaimed the man, "don't speak of indulgence in that house. I might as well have gone for six months to goal as

once for all the indulgence that was allowed us there. Of course, a man like me, when he has done his work, likes to spend his evenings now and then with his friends or at his club. But never could I get out of a night without first asking leave, and then it was always, 'What do you want to go out for, Thomas?' or 'How do you want to go to Thomas?' or 'How long shall you be gone, Thomas?' making me feel more like an ass as if I was a ticket-of-leave man than a man hearing the respectable character I did. And would you believe, though I offered to put a lock on the back door, and stand the expense myself, so as I might come in any hour of the night without disturbing the family, the gentleman he wouldn't allow it, saying he wondered only however I could ask such a thing. That doesn't much look like indulgence, I should say, should you?"

"As to the matter of going out at nights, Thomas," replied Mrs. Primworthy, "I know of many places where that is not allowed for a habit, and yet the master and mistress, I should say, quite as indulgent as need be. But now, what do you wish me to do for you? because, you see, here is some one else come to do business with me, and I dare say her time is precious, the same as mine is."

"Why, what I want is a regular first-class situation, what I think a butler's place the one to suit me best, because people always treat a butler with greater respect and consideration than they do a footman. It seems to me that butler holds a situation sort of half-way in a family between the parlor and the kitchen. He is not exactly master, nor he isn't looked upon quite like a servant; and then, too, his having charge of the wine, and the silver, and such like things, of itself makes his place of importance; and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Primworthy, it is not every one that is qualified for it, but after the experience I have had—"

Thomas was not permitted to finish the proclamation of his competency for the office newly aspired to, Mrs. Primworthy making so manifest a transfer of her attention to the new arrival that he made his bow, signaling again at the same time his intention of calling again in a day or two. What was affected at the threatened interview I did not learn, but I remember thinking at the time, had I been Mrs. Primworthy, I should be somewhat cautious about helping this airied gentleman into a first-class family, even in the new form of butler. Curiosity tempted me to ask the woman something about him, when she told me she had known him for several years; that he had been taken by the hand out of a hotel by some one or other who had given him a decent education, and provided him with two or three successive situations. Till lately, none knew his place better than did Thomas, but he had recently held a situation at a lady's —, who had, in fact, as Mrs. Primworthy expressed it, completely spoiled him. This lady, under the by no means rare delusion that she had got a treasure, was persuaded that she could not do enough for Thomas, nor require too little from him, coupled with a superstitious dread of the awfulness of the calamity, should Thomas ever leave her. Under the combined influence of these joint impressions, it was no wonder if Thomas' indulgences increased both in number and in magnitude. What he liked he did, and what he liked not he left alone or did by deputy, till it had grown hard to define exactly the nature of the position which he held in this lady's establishment; and there, no doubt, it was not long before the happy notion of a neutral office between stairs rule and down-stairs servitude for which he deemed himself so admirably suited. But in an evil day for him, Lady — took ill and died, died most unexpectedly. Poor Thomas, of course, participated in the general dispersion of her retinue that ensued, winding up in the service of this Mr. —, six months' experience of which had quite satisfied him.

It was now my turn, the last comer already alluded to before the individual whom I was expecting, and whose appearance was verily a relief to me; for altho' I confess to have been somewhat entertained by the story, I had been fain to listen to, I, in truth, desired to hear no more. My own business was of a very ordinary nature and speedily concluded. Had anything passed worth jotting down, it should have been recorded for the benefit of the reader; but I refrain from inflicting the recital of my commonplace transaction upon others, who, like myself, have probably had enough of the subject.

My admission behind the scenes, if I may so term it, went, I think, to strengthen the notions I had already held, as to the correct mode of dealing with domestic servants. I had always been under the impression that there were two errors to guard against, if you desire to be satisfactorily served. One is the mistake of being over strict, and the other that of being too indulgent. To