

with their new foliage, and thrushes sang among the orchard blossoms.

Something in the balmy breezes that stole across the meadows brought a whisper of comfort to the mourner's heart.

"It is always sunshine and gladness where she is," thought the maiden; "can I dare to wish her back again? Oh, Father, make me contented to resign her; make me fit to meet her once again; forgive my murmurings."

And even as she prayed a subtle fragrance filled the air, and she saw that the violet had opened wide its dewy leaves, showing its heart of gold.

Then she knew that another of God's blessings had come to her—the blessing of resignation and the fragrant of patience. So she arose from the selfishness of her first sorrow, and began to live again.

It was not much she could do; she was but a poor and powerless girl, but she resolved, for her dead mother's sake, to do every day some

deed of love and charity to those around her.

There was always somebody in trouble, some little sobbing child to be kissed, some hard-worked mother to be helped, some weary traveller to be refreshed and comforted, and in bearing the burdens of others she almost forgot the weight of her own.

But once (it was summer, a very hot and sultry day) she could not find any deed of love to do. All that she tried to accomplish she failed in; hard, impatient words rebuffed her, nobody seemed to want her pity or her help, and the twilight came and found her lonely and sorrowful.

"I have failed, my Father," she sobbed, "I have failed. Wilt Thou not let me work for Thee? Am I not fit even to do this?" A tiny breeze from the west caressed her cheek, and, looking up, she saw in the red sunset light that the rosebud had opened. There it shone, pure and beautiful, fold after fold

of snowy whiteness veiling the sweetness of its heart.

And a voice, unearthly in its tenderness, came to her wondering ear.

"My child," it said, "the year has brought thee three blessings: flowers from my garden, peace and everlasting gladness for the beloved, patience and resignation for thyself. Now, this night behold I give thee what shall make glad thy heart, and the lives of all around thee; I give thee charity, the pure and perfect love without which thy life is lived in vain. Heed not the world's indifference or neglect. I have seen thy strivings, thy failings, thy risings again. Behold, I love thee, and in My presence thou shalt find the fulness of joy." So the rose blooms for ever in the maiden's chamber, and the years that come and go can never dim its purity. The flowers that come from the garden of God know no winter, for they are everlasting!

FLORENCE LESLIE HENDERSON.



THE LADIES OF THE OLDEN TIMES.



has been justly remarked that "a woman's work is never done," if she be the mistress of a household, even in these days, when provisions are so easily attainable, articles of clothing sold ready made, and shops and markets

often within a stone's throw. From the hour she rises till the lights are extinguished at night, domestic duties must occupy her thoughts and hands, in common with those outside the homestead, where, amongst her neighbouring associates, her relatives, and her pensioners, there are extra claims on her time and thoughts.

But if under circumstances so conducive to the furtherance of her work and her prospective arrangements she find her hands so full from morning till night, imagine what the pressure of her duties must have been, and what the tax of her powers of forethought and judgment in the olden times of this once "merrie England"!

Let us take a retrospect of what house-keeping was, as carried on in our great houses, in the Middle Ages.

No railroad nor coach communications lent

their timely aid; no express office nor parcels post conveyed her household supplies; no shops nor markets invited a weekly visit, within a few miles' drive of her own door, unless, indeed, her domain chanced to be situate in or near the metropolis, or one of the great cities of those times, which were "few and far between."

Yet, circumstanced like this, consider the far wider range of a lady's field of work compared with the limits assigned to her now!

The great independent middle class, with which our country is now crowded, I may almost affirm did not exist in the times of which I write.

The population was mainly divided into the titled and untitled aristocracy and their retainers. Certain merchants and professional men were to be found in the chief cities, and ecclesiastics both regular and secular; the former living in large communities, as did the "religious" of our own sex. But all the same, the vast multitudes of independent respectable people, who have inherited the fruits of their own or their ancestors' industry or speculations, or who have not yet retired from professional or commercial business, and hold a special and honourable place of their own, in a country "whose merchants are princes"—this middle class exists nowhere else in Europe in such stupendous proportions, and was almost unknown in England in the Middle Ages.

The great castles of the nobility contained on an average some forty or fifty persons each, not to speak of the retainers and poorer folks immediately attached to them, in the small dwellings that were grouped together under their shadow. So also in the old country seats and halls of the untitled gentry the several households consisted of some thirty or forty persons, both male and female.

Imagine, therefore, what it must have been to provide for all these when a twelvemonths' stores had to be laid in. Meat had to be procured and salted at Martinmas; salt fish of various kinds in considerable quantities, barley and oatmeal likewise; baking for the whole community being then accomplished at home. They had no sugar, so honey was stored in lieu of it; and no coal, so firewood had to be cut down, chopped up, and piled ready for use; carpets being unknown for many centuries in these feudal halls, rushes were in great requisition, and had to be gathered and dried in great quantities, as the spacious floors needed a continual renewal of this primitive covering.

It was the practice in those times to observe many days in commemoration of various sacred or traditional events, to which certain viands, as well as curious customs, were consecrated. Thus the important cake for Twelfth Night needed almonds and raisins; the Christmas posset, cinnamon, ginger, and



IN THE DAYS OF YORE.

nutmegs; Sheer Monday its furrery; Palm Sunday its figs; All Hallows Eve its nuts; Good Friday, spices and currants for the hot cross buns, and many other days their respective commemorative esculents.

All these things had to be remembered, and provided for in suitable quantities, and in so doing not merely was the great household to be counted head by head, but the poor were never forgotten. The very title "lady," derived from the Saxon *Hleafdian*, or *Væf-dig*, from *Laf* or *Hlaf*, a loaf, and *dian*, to serve, explains her title by her benevolent office of bread-server, it being the custom of ladies not only to carve for their family and guests, but to distribute food to the poor at their doors at stated periods.

Over and above all this there were no gin palaces and beer breweries supplying the country at large; but the mistress of each such mansion or castle had a still-room of her own, and manufactured the wines and cordials, as well as the herb teas, balsams, and perfumes, and brewed all the beer which served for every meal, and which has since been substituted by tea, coffee, chocolate, and cocoa. Of course the calculations necessary for procuring the component parts of all the above-named productions of the still-room required for such a multitude of persons, and then the superintendence of their manufacture, and the giving out day by day of the quantities necessary, must have increased the work and responsibilities of her who was indeed the guide of the house.

The paragon housewife described by Solomon in a period of the world's history far more remote very correctly as well as graphically describes the arduous and most extensive nature of the duties devolving on our own English ladies till within some two hundred years ago; for those which have been enumerated by no means filled up the sum total of all that devolved upon them. The clothing of the enormous household demanded the consideration of the mistress of the house from first to last. Beginning with the selection of the several qualities of yarn, and calculation of quantities to the completion of each garment—all devolved on her. She purchased the flax and the wool (cotton yarn was not manufactured in this country till about the year 1772, although calico was imported from India in 1631); and the carding, spinning, and weaving, the cutting out and making into every description of male and female attire, all had to be begun and completed at home. With the exception of the very costly articles, which could be purchased ready-made, if not always convenient to embroider them with her own and her maidens' hands, the whole community located in and around these feudal mansions were clothed in homespun, in the literal sense of the term.

Nor were the labours of the lady-in-chief completed with making a provision for some thirty or forty persons in the matter of food and clothing; for at least during the reigns of Henry VII., Henry VIII., and throughout that of Elizabeth, the castles of the nobility and gentry were academies for the youthful sons and daughters of families of gentle birth. The study of the dead languages, which was at one time confined to the ecclesiastics, spread among the nobility and gentry, and as young girls were placed in these baronial halls with the view to their obtaining a liberal education, as well as an introduction into the highest society in the land, the necessary supervision of their studies, their dress, manners, and introductions, constituted no trifling item amongst the duties of the lady of the house.

These young people were expected to learn and occupy themselves with the daily avocations of their patroness, assisting and attending upon her like daughters; and many of them

remained permanently attached to those families. Languages, both modern and dead, music, including harp and lute, "siferinge," "wrightinge," "drawinge," tapestry work and all kinds of decorative stitchery, as well as spinning and plain-sewing, were all taught them freely in these ancient mansions during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries; besides all the mysteries of the kitchen, still-room, and other extensive offices.

Thus the great ladies of those primitive times were models for their successors. If living in an age of much superstition, at least we trace in every letter of theirs, or other record of their sentiments, that God's good providence was ever acknowledged; their faith was simple, and unclouded with the materialism and scepticism of modern days; and they proved themselves indeed the nursing mothers of their country.

Before dismissing the subject of education, perhaps I should anticipate the inquiry of some reader as to how it was carried on at a still earlier period than the centuries specified during the three reigns before named.

In those still more remote periods the work was carried on in the great convents, which were subsequently assisted, and still later substituted, in the work by the great patrician houses. These conventual establishments were very different institutions from those at present existing, although respectively varying at that time in importance and wealth.

Here again on the lady-in-chief the great responsibilities of a large community of men and women devolved, over whom she ruled with little less than sovereign power. You will the better realise this when I tell you that an abbess presiding over one of these conventual houses exercised manorial jurisdiction, held a manorial court, and had a seat in Parliament. She had seneschals, esquires, gentlemen, yeomen, and (excepting the archers and other men-at-arms) she had the complete establishment of a baronial castle. As regards her women, she had nuns, lay sisters, an infirmarer (who was a medical practitioner and spiritual adviser), a cellaress who acted as steward, a præcentrix, who not only led the choir, but united with this office that of librarian. There were also ladies who resided in the convent as boarders, all the scholars before-named, and servants both male and female.

As these great conventual establishments grew up all over the kingdom from the time of the mission of Augustine, they became, like the monasteries of the monks, the great seats of learning, the convent colleges for ladies being sometimes called "Shee Schools." The education given was of an extensive and very superior kind; and as the institutions were well endowed, no charge was made for it. The teachers were women of the highest reputation, and looked up to with extreme respect. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the ecclesiastical institutions was the fact, to which a passing allusion was made, that not only could scholars come and go freely, but there was no rule constraining ladies who desired an asylum within their walls to take religious vows. Thus, multitudes took refuge under the powerful protection of the abbesses, in those lawless and stormy days, to escape from undesirable marriages, the hands of unscrupulous enemies, or for the luxury of a quiet retreat in times of great affliction, where seclusion might be enjoyed at will.

These convent colleges gave place, more or less gradually, to the private academies into which our great ancestral mansions were constituted, as I have already described; and well was the work carried on till after the days of Elizabeth. Then ornamental needlework declined. Here and there it was practised, but it ceased to be an essential part of education. Time passed on, and a deterioration commenced, till in the early part of the eighteenth century idleness, frivolity, extra-

vagance, and worse evils in their train, including profanity, characterised for a time the debased descendants of their virtuous, God-fearing, industrious, and learned predecessors.

In confirmation of what I say I need only bid you look at the pictures of the head-dresses of the eighteenth century, to show how utterly frivolous and useless members of society were a vast proportion of the ladies, and no less so the men, of that degraded period. More than this, I may remind you of the fact that an appeal was made to the editor of the *Spectator* to encourage greater industry amongst the girls of that deteriorated generation, which resulted in a recommendation that no girl should receive a man's addresses till she could appear in a suit of her own embroidery; nor be married until she had worked her pillows, and had made a child's mantle with her own fingers.

Happily there were those amongst them that rose superior to the times in which they lived, and a great alteration for the better was ushered in by the nineteenth century. A remarkable change has likewise gradually developed in the growth of the enormous independent middle class of society, of the schools and colleges, and the comparative poverty of the collateral branches of the nobility and gentry. This latter fact has greatly changed the style of housekeeping, and the power of the mistress of each reduced household is limited to providing for her own children and two or three servants. Nor has she assistants to aid her in the accomplishment of duties more extensive than those that Providence has laid upon her shoulders under the modern régime. Art in economising is one which in these latter days she has to learn: and a hard and painful lesson it is. And although her jurisdiction over a household is of a comparatively limited character, viewed in connection with that exercised by the great ladies of bygone times, a woman's work even now, if thoroughly done, is "never over," from morning till night.

For a summary of this work I would direct your attention to the article entitled "The Duties of Wives and Mothers."

Many of my readers are doubtless well acquainted with the foregoing facts, culled from our ancient records; so I must ask their indulgence for the sake of others less privileged than themselves.

With clearer religious light, stricter laws for personal protection, clothing and food ready prepared for use at their doors, and facilities of communication that decrease all a modern housekeeper's difficulties—the position of a matron of the higher classes in the present day is not without its due proportion of compensations.

The heavy tax which a free benevolence imposed on the ladies of olden times, in behalf of their poor retainers and others, is succeeded now by national poor rates; and the small subscriptions of a vast multitude of persons to charitable institutions of every description relieves the much impoverished gentry of a certain amount of pressure without the walls of their private dwellings.

We have, therefore, one and all, much cause for thankfulness to Him who appointed the little niche for us each; nor is a lady's condition so very inferior in comfort now, though the times be so greatly changed, as would at first sight appear. Our duties, whether married or single, are sufficiently numerous and onerous; and the wise amongst us would scarcely aspire to heavier responsibilities; and whatever our social position may be, may it be ours some day to hear those ineffably joy-giving words, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SOPHIA F. A. CAULFIELD.