(excerpts from) The Book of Household Management
by Mrs. Isabella Beeton

full title:
THE BOOK OF HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT; Comprising Information for the MISTRESS, HOUSEKEEPER, COOK, KITCHEN-MAID, BUTLER, FOOTMAN, COACHMAN, VALET, UPPER AND UNDER HOUSE-MAIDS, LADY'S-MAID, MAID-OF-ALL-WORK, LAUNDRY-MAID, NURSE AND NURSE-MAID, MONTHLY, WET, AND SICK NURSES, ETC. ETC. ALSO, SANITARY, MEDICAL, & LEGAL MEMORANDA; WITH A HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN, PROPERTIES, AND USES OF ALL THINGS CONNECTED WITH HOME LIFE AND COMFORT. BY MRS. ISABELLA BEETON.

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“Nothing lovelier can be found In Woman, than to study household good.”
--MILTON.

PREFACE. . . . I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly-cooked dinners and untidy ways. Men are now so well served out of doors,—at their clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining-houses, that in order to compete with the attractions of these places, a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home.

. . . Besides the great portion of the book which has especial reference to the cook's department, there are chapters devoted to those of the other servants of the household, who have all, I trust, their duties clearly assigned to them.

CHAPTER I. THE MISTRESS.¹

"Strength, and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household; and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."—_Proverbs_, xxxi. 25-28.

¹ Meaning the married “mistress of the house.”
I. AS WITH THE COMMANDER OF AN ARMY, or the leader of any
enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole
establishment; and just in proportion as she performs her duties intelligently and
thoroughly, so will her domestics follow in her path. Of all those acquirements, which
more particularly belong to the feminine character, there are none which take a higher
rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties; for on
these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family. In
this opinion we are borne out by the author of "The Vicar of Wakefield," who says: "The
modest virgin, the prudent wife, and the careful matron, are much more serviceable in life
than petticoated philosophers, blustering heroines, or virago queens. She who makes her
husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains up the other
to virtue, is a much greater character than ladies described in romances, whose whole
occupation is to murder mankind with shafts from their quiver, or their eyes."

2. PURSUING THIS PICTURE, we may add, that to be a good housewife does
not necessarily imply an abandonment of proper pleasures or amusing recreation; and we
think it the more necessary to express this, as the performance of the duties of a mistress
may, to some minds, perhaps seem to be incompatible with the enjoyment of life. Let us,
however, now proceed to describe some of those home qualities and virtues which are
necessary to the proper management of a Household, and then point out the plan which
may be the most profitably pursued for the daily regulation of its affairs.

3. EARLY RISING IS ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL QUALITIES which
enter into good Household Management, as it is not only the parent of health, but of
innumerable other advantages. Indeed, when a mistress is an early riser, it is almost
certain that her house will be orderly and well-managed. On the contrary, if she remain in
bed till a late hour, then the domestics, who, as we have before observed, invariably
partake somewhat of their mistress's character, will surely become sluggards. To self-
indulgence all are more or less disposed, and it is not to be expected that servants are
freer from this fault than the heads of houses. The great Lord Chatham thus gave his
advice in reference to this subject:--"I would have inscribed on the curtains of your bed,
and the walls of your chamber, 'If you do not rise early, you can make progress in
nothing.'"

4. CLEANLINESS IS ALSO INDISPENSABLE TO HEALTH, and must be
studied both in regard to the person and the house, and all that it contains. Cold or tepid
baths should be employed every morning, unless, on account of illness or other
circumstances, they should be deemed objectionable . . . .

5. FRUGALITY AND ECONOMY ARE HOME VIRTUES, without which no
household can prosper. Dr. Johnson says: "Frugality may be termed the daughter of
Prudence, the sister of Temperance, and the parent of Liberty. He that is extravagant will
quickly become poor, and poverty will enforce dependence and invite corruption." The
necessity of practising economy should be evident to every one, whether in the
possession of an income no more than sufficient for a family's requirements, or of a large
fortune, which puts financial adversity out of the question. We must always remember
that it is a great merit in housekeeping to manage a little well. "He is a good waggoner," says Bishop Hall, "that can turn in a little room. To live well in abundance is the praise of the estate, not of the person. I will study more how to give a good account of my little, than how to make it more." In this there is true wisdom, and it may be added, that those who can manage a little well, are most likely to succeed in their management of larger matters. Economy and frugality must never, however, be allowed to degenerate into parsimony and meanness.

6. THE CHOICE OF ACQUAINTANCES is very important to the happiness of a mistress and her family. A gossiping acquaintance, who indulges in the scandal and ridicule of her neighbours, should be avoided as a pestilence. It is likewise all-necessary to beware, as Thomson sings,

"The whisper'd tale, That, like the fabling Nile, no fountain knows;--
Fair-laced Deceit, whose wily, conscious aye Ne'er looks direct; the
tongue that licks the dust But, when it safely dares, as prompt to sting."

If the duties of a family do not sufficiently occupy the time of a mistress, society should be formed of such a kind as will tend to the mutual interchange of general and interesting information.

8. HOSPITALITY IS A MOST EXCELLENT VIRTUE; but care must be taken that the love of company, for its own sake, does not become a prevailing passion; for then the habit is no longer hospitality, but dissipation. Reality and truthfulness in this, as in all other duties of life, are the points to be studied; for, as Washington Irving well says, "There is an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality, which cannot be described, but is immediately felt, and puts the stranger at once at his ease." With respect to the continuance of friendships, however, it may be found necessary, in some cases, for a mistress to relinquish, on assuming the responsibility of a household, many of those commenced in the earlier part of her life. This will be the more requisite, if the number still retained be quite equal to her means and opportunities.

10. GOOD TEMPER SHOULD BE CULTIVATED by every mistress, as upon it the welfare of the household may be said to turn; indeed, its influence can hardly be over-estimated, as it has the effect of moulding the characters of those around her, and of acting most beneficially on the happiness of the domestic circle. Every head of a household should strive to be cheerful, and should never fail to show a deep interest in all that appertains to the well-being of those who claim the protection of her roof. Gentleness, not partial and temporary, but universal and regular, should pervade her conduct; for where such a spirit is habitually manifested, it not only delights her children, but makes her domestics attentive and respectful; her visitors are also pleased by it, and their happiness is increased.

11. ON THE IMPORTANT SUBJECT OF DRESS AND FASHION we cannot do better than quote an opinion from the eighth volume of the "Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine." The writer there says, "Let people write, talk, lecture, satirize, as they may, it
cannot be denied that, whatever is the prevailing mode in attire, let it intrinsically be ever so absurd, it will never __look__ as ridiculous as another, or as any other, which, however convenient, comfortable, or even becoming, is totally opposite in style to that generally worn."

13. THE DRESS OF THE MISTRESS should always be adapted to her circumstances, and be varied with different occasions. Thus, at breakfast she should be attired in a very neat and simple manner, wearing no ornaments. If this dress should decidedly pertain only to the breakfast-hour, and be specially suited for such domestic occupations as usually follow that meal, then it would be well to exchange it before the time for receiving visitors, if the mistress be in the habit of doing so. It is still to be remembered, however, that, in changing the dress, jewellery and ornaments are not to be worn until the full dress for dinner is assumed. Further information and hints on the subject of the toilet will appear under the department of the "LADY'S-MAID." The advice of Polonius to his son Laer特斯, in Shakspeare's tragedy of "Hamlet," is most excellent; and although given to one of the male sex, will equally apply to a "fayre ladye:"--"Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy; For the apparel oft proclaims the man."

14. CHARITY AND BENEVOLENCE ARE DUTIES which a mistress owes to herself as well as to her fellow-creatures; and there is scarcely any income so small, but something may be spared from it, even if it be but "the widow's mite." It is to be always remembered, however, that it is the _spirit_ of charity which imparts to the gift a value far beyond its actual amount, and is by far its better part. True Charity, a plant divinely nursed, Fed by the love from which it rose at first, Thrives against hope, and, in the rudest scene, Storms but enliven its unfading green; Exub'rant is the shadow it supplies, Its fruit on earth, its growth above the skies. Visiting the houses of the poor is the only practical way really to understand the actual state of each family; and although there may be difficulties in following out this plan in the metropolis and other large cities, yet in country towns and rural districts these objections do not obtain. Great advantages may result from visits paid to the poor; for there being, unfortunately, much ignorance, generally, amongst them with respect to all household knowledge, there will be opportunities for advising and instructing them, in a pleasant and unobtrusive manner, in cleanliness, industry, cookery, and good management.

16. A HOUSEKEEPING ACCOUNT-BOOK should invariably be kept, and kept punctually and precisely. The plan for keeping household accounts, which we should recommend, would be to make an entry, that is, write down into a daily diary every amount paid on that particular day, be it ever so small; then, at the end of the month, let these various payments be ranged under their specific heads of Butcher, Baker, &c.; and thus will be seen the proportions paid to each tradesman, and any one month's expenses may be contrasted with another. The housekeeping accounts should be balanced not less than once a month; so that you may see that the money you have in hand tallies with your account of it in your diary. Judge Haliburton never wrote truer words than when he said, "No man is rich whose expenditure exceeds his means, and no one is poor whose incomings exceed his outgoings." When, in a large establishment, a housekeeper is
kept, it will be advisable for the mistress to examine her accounts regularly. Then any increase of expenditure which may be apparent, can easily be explained, and the housekeeper will have the satisfaction of knowing whether her efforts to manage her department well and economically, have been successful.

17. ENGAGING DOMESTICS\(^2\) is one of those duties in which the judgment of the mistress must be keenly exercised. There are some respectable registry-offices, where good servants may sometimes be hired; but the plan rather to be recommended is, for the mistress to make inquiry amongst her circle of friends and acquaintances, and her tradespeople. The latter generally know those in their neighbourhood, who are wanting situations, and will communicate with them, when a personal interview with some of them will enable the mistress to form some idea of the characters of the applicants, and to suit herself accordingly. We would here point out an error--and a grave one it is--into which some mistresses fall. They do not, when engaging a servant, expressly tell her all the duties which she will be expected to perform. This is an act of omission severely to be reprehended. Every portion of work which the maid will have to do, should be plainly stated by the mistress, and understood by the servant. If this plan is not carefully adhered to, domestic contention is almost certain to ensue, and this may not be easily settled; so that a change of servants, which is so much to be deprecated, is continually occurring.

19. THE TREATMENT OF SERVANTS is of the highest possible moment, as well to the mistress as to the domestics themselves. On the head of the house the latter will naturally fix their attention; and if they perceive that the mistress's conduct is regulated by high and correct principles, they will not fail to respect her. If, also, a benevolent desire is shown to promote their comfort, at the same time that a steady performance of their duty is exacted, then their respect will not be unmingled with affection, and they will be still more solicitous to continue to deserve her favour.

20. IN GIVING A CHARACTER, it is scarcely necessary to say that the mistress should be guided by a sense of strict justice. It is not fair for one lady to recommend to another, a servant she would not keep herself. The benefit, too, to the servant herself is of small advantage; for the failings which she possesses will increase if suffered to be indulged with impunity. It is hardly necessary to remark, on the other hand, that no angry feelings on the part of a mistress towards her late servant, should ever be allowed, in the slightest degree, to influence her, so far as to induce her to disparage her maid's character.

\(^{2}\) Meaning domestic, household servants.