Ida M. Tarbell
120 East 19th St.
New York, N. Y.

(Name not to be used in
connection with article)

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

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I cannot remember when I did not look with stern disapproval on the way what we called the servant question was handled in the households with which I was familiar, our own included. They were not grand households. Their equipment was rarely beyond two - a cook and a maid with possibly a laundress in for a day or two. My notion was that as a rule these servants of whom my mother and her friends constantly complained were inefficient and unreliable because their mistresses were negligent and unsympathetic. I elaborated my ideas in detail and when I had the opportunity laid them down with emphasis. They received scant attention. "Try it yourself," was the usual answer of my experienced elders.

Years later having established myself modestly in New York in a business which demanded frequent trips through the country, I became weary of boarding and decided to set up a ménage of my own. My earnings justified one maid. Here, I told myself, was the opportunity to prove the perfection of those theories of the proper relationship of mistress and maid I had developed so carefully in my earlier years and had preached with such confidence.

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Fortune favored me at the start furnishing me with and Irish woman of some fifty years, a widow, her two little girls in orphanages. Bridget was one of the most respectable looking people I ever saw. A friend who dropped in often after I set up my household used to say, "she gives the appearance of a complete battery of servants from head butler to scullery maid."

To do so was apparently the chief ambition of Bridget's life, and she knew what was necessary to achieve it for she had had a long service as an under-maid in one of the swankiest establishments in New York City.

When I sometimes rebelled at frills which seemed to me entirely inappropriate to my modest quarters, she put me in my place by telling me of the time when an under-butler being sick, she was put into regalia and sent from the kitchen to the dining room to help serve a grand dinner on the family's gold service, used only on the greatest occasion. I cannot tell how many times Bridget humbled me with that gold service.

But I liked it. She was so faithful to my needs. My business trips were hard and wearing. I would arrive early in the morning after a fatiguing journey to find a fire on the hearth, my newspaper beside it, and "Wouldn't I have my breakfast here and not in the dining room?" She treated me like a child until my aching body was restored, when I had to come to heel.

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But Bridget was Irish and needed company. My program provided for "the social need of employee" - my idea of her social need. To begin with I insisted that her quarters be livable. I had the kitchen and bed room in the little apartment gay with chintz and comfortable furnishings. I also had laid down what seemed to me a reasonable social schedule:- Once a week she could invite a friend to dinner, Sunday dinner if she wished; once a week she could have tea for as many as she could accomodate. This outside of her Thursday and Sunday afternoons. Thus the social instinct was to be satisfied.

Bridget never abused her privileges. Indeed, she used them very little. When I was at home I and my friends seemed to be enough for her. When I was gone it was another thing. It so happened that for three successive years I made Spring trips of six to eight weeks leaving Bridget by herself. On my return from the second of these trips I found the woman was no longer the immaculate person to whom I had become accustomed. Her hair was often tousled, her apron soiled, she was not particular about the service. She did not insist that there should be flowers on the table. It was now I who had to look after the "grand impression." I did the best I could but obviously Bridget thought me an amateur.

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The third summer when I returned from my long absence I did not have the chance to check up on Bridget's condition for I had not been home twenty four hours when the Superintendent of the house came to see me.

"I am sorry," he said, "I am afraid you will have to put Bridget out."

"Put Bridget out," I cried, "I couldn't live without her. What in the world is the trouble?"

"Well, of course," he said, "you are too inexperienced to know. In these long absences of yours Bridget being lonesome has taken to drink. We have had some bad times with her. The maids on the other floors are beginning to rebel. She gets noisy sometimes."

I was horrified at the situation. "Give me a little time," I begged. It took but little time to find that the complaints were not exagerrated. Bridget had become a tippler - a very serious tippler. It was all tooobbvious. Chintz curtains and the right to ask her friends to tea, a comfortable bed and rocking chair were not enough for Bridget. There had to be something doing from morning until night, and some reason for doing it - company - excitement. For that she would wear her fingers to the bone polishing silver and brass, would rejoice in a dinner party every night. But to be left alone in that little apartment for weeks at a time with nothing to do, nobody to serve. That was not a life and she had taken refuge in the beer bottle. Bridget had to go.

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I do not remember now how it came about that she was replaced by one of the most beautiful girls I ever saw - a tall, slender, dark-haired, lovely colored Swede. She made the rather dreary apartment bloom. And so efficient. I boasted of her to my friends until finally the husband of one of them said to me after one of my little parties, "Keep an eye on that girl." I resented the hint that anything could be wrong with my beautiful,capable Nora.

My code included a rule firmly forbidding spying. Having carefully scrutinized a maid's recommendations, carefully questioned and laid down duties and privileges I argued that she must be trusted. Life in her off hours was to be exclusively hers.

Now the apartment I was occupying was admirably adapted to segregate maid and mistress. The kitchen and maid's room were at the end of a long hall off of which ran my quarters. When I said goodnight after dinner, I felt I had no business in the maid's end of the house.

But the cryptic warning of my friend's husband, a man who knew his world, made me uneasy. Was there something about Nora that I ought to know and did not know? How was I going to find out? Reluntantly I concluded I better look into her room when she was out, something I had never done - contrary to code. The first thing my eye fell upon was a framed photograph on her dressing table, a photograph of a

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man familiar to every New Yorker at that moment, with the inscription - "To Nora with love." But no signature. Beside the photograph was a little box filled with five dollar gold pieces.

When I told the friend who had first put a suspicion of the girl into my mind of the box of gold pieces commenting on her thrift, "Oh, yes," he said, "banque d' amour."

Before I had an opportunity for further spying on Nora the Superintendent came soon to see me. "Sorry," he said, "you'll have to let your maid go."

"But why," I said. "Well," he said, "the maids on the backstairs tell me that there are few nights that a man does not come up the stairs and stay until all hours in the morning. To be frank she is making your kitchen a place of assignation."

I had not the courage to front Nora with the charge nor was it necessary. There were too many corroborating incidents now that my wits were working. I think I made the excuse that I was going on a rather long trip and could not afford to keep a maid in the apartment for so long an absence.

Some time went by before I had rallied sufficiently to make another trial and this time it looked to me as if I were on ground where my theories would work. Stella my new maid was a woman of perhaps forty, married, so she said, her husband

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in the old country. She was trim, pretty, gay, a marvel at efficienty, the best cook that ever catered to my appetite.

Matters went on very well for a few months when suddenly one afternoon as I was reading quietly by my fire Stella flew in like a whirlwind, throwing herself on her knees beside me, sobbing out,

"I vill not geeve him up, I vill not geeve him up."

I could make neither head nor tail to the agonized declaration. "I do not know what you are talking about, Stella," I said, "but I probably wouldn't give him up either. Sit down and tell me what the trouble is."

There were various incoherent answers to my increasingly intelligent questions. Obviously it was a case of a man not her husband. According to Stella, it was a case of jealousy on the part of the maids along the back stairs. They had no man, she had. They were jealous. They had said she must go if she did not give him up, and she never, never would.

Not only the girls objected, I gathered, but the "boss" had been to see her.

"I'll have to look into this," was all that I could say and I sought the Superintendent.

"I was coming to see you," he said, "your Stella had been receiving a lover three or four nights a week, not merely an evening call but an all-night affair, ending up

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with a breakfast on your ham and eggs and coffee.

I was over-whelmed by the disaster. This couldn't go on. Instead of being a social reformer I was a social menace.

The Spring was near and I closed the apartment and went to the country for the summer. Now in the little Inn where I boarded there waited on me a trim girl of eighteen or nineteen. I often talked with her. I found her to be of a respectable Slovakian family, well trained, too young, too modest, I thought, for a knowledge of the wicked ways of the world. Why should I not take her with me back to town, train her, watch her, see that no such mischief went on as had wrecked my previous experiments?

Lilly jumped at the chance. All went well for five or six months. I watched closely. I saw that she went to church, talked to the Priest about her, saw that relatives she had in the suburbs came to see her occasionally, that she went out regularly to see them. I felt very smug about my performance. And then one night after I was in bed Lilly ran into my room crying loudly that she was dying. I took it as a case of painful mensturation and was quickly applying the usual remedies.

But there was no ease. Finally the girl ran through the long hall back to her room sobbing, "You don't understand. You don't understand."

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I raced after her but she had locked her door. I heard a few screamms and then quiet. Light dawned on me. Lilly was in what we used to speak of as "the family way." She had been trying to get rid of her baby. I ran to the telephone and called my near-by Doctor. "You must come at once. I have a very sick maid and I am afraid it is a mis-carriage." The Doctor uttered something which sounded like "damn", but added that he would be there at once - and he was.

At the doctor's order the door was unlocked. He entered while I waited on the outside. After twenty minutes or more he came out looking grim. "Yes," he said, "it is a mis-carriage. She has had murderous advice, is a very sick girl. You'll have to get her to the maternity hospital."

And so about one o'clock in the morning an ambulance came and the orderlies carried out a very white, very pathetic little Lilly.

"Wait three or four days before you go to see her," they told me.

As soon as I was allowed I did go. For some reason I thought it was my duty to find out the name of the man in the case. What I would have done with it I do not know - probably nothing. Lilly had more sense than I. I might as well have questioned a stone wall.

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A few weeks later I took her back to the country and deposited her safely with her family. When summer came I went back to the old Inn and there was Lilly waiting on me, the same tidy, pretty innocent girl who had first attracted me. We picked up our relations where we had left them a year before. No word ever passed between us of that hectic night.

But the affair with Lilly ended housekeeping and the la bonne à tout faire for me. It also laid on the shelf my pretty notions of the proper relationship of mistress and maid. I concluded that I must know more of the social needs of maids before I aggin attempted to provide for them.

A Disillusioned Theorist

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