GUILD OF DAMES OF THE HOUSEHOLD—
ONE PRACTICAL SOLUTION OF THE SERVANT
PROBLEM:  BY MARY RANKIN CRANSTON

THE Guild of Domestic Dames of the Household in
England is a training school for domestic servants. It
differs from other organizations of like character in
that its object is to attract educated women to house-
hold work, and, through them, to raise the standard of
such employment to the level of other vocations. The
domestic service question, which may now be called the world riddle,
as it has spread to almost every country, is perhaps the most im-
portant of all the problems clamoring to be settled, since upon its
solution depends the preservation, and failure to solve it means the
destruction, of the home. It is quite fitting that England, pre-em-
inently a home-loving and home-making country, should have made
the first successful attempt to solve this problem along genuinely
economic lines.

That such a question exists to-day is due primarily to the fact that
women, characteristically uninventive, are still following the out-
grown domestic methods of their grandmothers, and failing to
develop the originality necessary for twentieth century housekeeping.
It is not strange that unprogressive mistresses on the one hand and a
highly developed factory system on the other should have depleted
the ranks of household workers, causing the demand to so far exceed
the supply that a difficult situation has arisen.

THE Guild of Dames of the Household, formed in 1900 by
Miss Nixon, Lady Knightly of Fawsley, Miss Brabazon, Mrs.
Cobden-Sanderson and others, endeavors to create a better
understanding between mistress and maid in order that the mistress
may have more conscientious service and that the maid may be some-
thing more than a drudge; that she may have time for her very own
in which to rest and amuse herself after the manner of all other
human beings. The Guild insists upon the maintenance of good
conditions of work and fair conditions of freedom from work or, in
other words, sufficient time off duty and the elimination of causes
which have discouraged educated women from entering the field.

At Brabazon House, as the training school is called, domestic
service is considered a profession, and the charming old English
word dame is substituted for the objectionable word servant. Without doubt this happy change of name and the fact that students are not only called ladies, but are consistently treated as such, have done more than all else to encourage desirable women to enter service. And why should not our maids be treated as rational, self-respecting women? In view of our great need for the intelligent, conscientious service that makes household machinery move without friction, the members of a family circle should be deeply grateful to those who make life comfortable through ministering to their wants. One of life’s highest laws is that of service and everybody comes within its scope. The trouble is that certain kinds of service are considered desirable and other forms undesirable.

If houses could be planned by women who spend most of their lives within them instead of by men, as they are to-day; if housekeepers would make use of the existing labor-saving devices for the elimination of drudgery and would invent more; if our maids were shown more consideration instead of being openly, arrogantly treated as inferiors; if hours of labor could be regulated as in other industries; and if, above all, the objectionable word servant could become obsolete—then only captious, irritable mistresses would find themselves harassed by a domestic service problem. In other words, some one may say, a revolution is necessary to inaugurate a reign of peace. Not at all; in reality it is not nearly so great an undertaking as that. It would mean merely the application to housekeeping matters of that good old rule to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Nor would this mean that our maids should entertain their company in our drawing-rooms, play on our pianos or sit in our boxes at the opera, but that instead of paying no attention to their human desires and needs there may be an attractive sitting-room of their own, or, if the limitations of space should forbid that, the kitchen, which must then be the sitting-room as well, should contain pretty things as far as consistent with the daily work which goes on therein, that properly furnished bedrooms may be well lighted and heated and bathing facilities provided. Surely these are not unreasonable demands, but merely what every human being has the right to expect.
AN applicant for training at Brabazon House must first of all fill out a blank in which she gives, among other facts, her age, previous occupation, references, religious denomination, whether single, married or widow, and in which she agrees to rise early, work faithfully and to do all in her power to "uphold the dignity of labor." There is then a probationary period of two weeks after which she is accepted as a resident student at a weekly charge of from twelve to fifteen shillings ($3.00 to $3.50). If, during her probation, she is found unfit or undesirable, she is quietly asked to withdraw. The lessons extend over a period of one to three months, according to previous experience and natural aptitude.

Cooking dames are taught good, plain cooking, care of the kitchen, kitchen utensils and cooking stoves, and some house work. House and parlor dames are taught the care of rooms, sweeping, washing of linoleum, crockery, etc., polishing of furniture, grates, "boots," care of silver and china, setting the table and waiting at table. Nursery dames learn how to care for babies and young children and their nurseries, and study kindergarten work. As real, live babies are indispensable for practical training, the Guild has opened a nursery which receives children of working mothers and the small children of families having illness in the house. The babies are admitted for long visits, the length of time being decided by the superintendent. Great care is taken to prevent the weakening of parental responsibility, which might ensue from an over-long residence at Brabazon House. There is, however, little danger of this where so many women find it necessary to work and where nurseries are so scarce as in England.

For the first six weeks of her stay each dame assists in the nursery, dividing her time between care of the babies and the kindergarten; then she becomes head nurse for another six weeks if she has proven herself to be a baby lover and a reliable student, and has entire charge of one baby. Under the guidance of a teacher this nursery dame bathes, feeds and exercises the baby, being relieved two hours daily by an assistant. Alternating with teacher or assistant she takes her small charge for three nights at a time and in this way learns to observe all the changes of babyhood, is conscious of the responsibility placed upon her and has the pleasure and reward of seeing the results of her care.
SOLVING THE SERVANT PROBLEM

THE dames in training are usually young women compelled to be self-supporting and without the means for specialized study, which is always expensive. There are others who have had few opportunities for intellectual development. The average woman is inherently domestic; many prefer household work and are better fitted for it than for any other occupation, and so, many of the students at Brabazon House come from this grade of women, who are willing to enter service provided they may work under reasonable conditions. The students belong to these three classes and Brabazon House has been full since the day it was opened.

Last year seventy-one dames were enrolled; positions were found for forty-one, ten were unsatisfactory and were rejected while students, nine were taught that they might properly do their own work, four gave up, five are continuing their studies, and two are yet to be placed. As in other professions, a certain number fail to develop the adaptability which makes for success. At present one hundred and fifty dames are at work in various households. One lady, who has a beautiful home not far from London, employs nine of them, who do all the work of her house to her perfect satisfaction.

While the demand for their graduates is far greater than the supply and the Guild could place the dames many times over, great care is exercised to ensure improved conditions of work. An employer, in making application for a dame, must state clearly and fully what her duties will be, must agree to give her a separate bedroom not in the basement, and not require her to live with ordinary servants if these are in the house; must specify the amount of time off duty daily, weekly and on Sunday, and must consent to her wearing the simple uniform and badge of the Guild and not to require her to wear any other distinctive dress. The salary must also be agreed upon. When these matters are disposed of the Guild brings the mistress and dame into communication with each other, usually with happy results for both. For this service the employer pays one shilling (25 cents) to the Guild; there is no charge for the dame.

THE two extremes of society, the wealthy who employ a retinue of servants at high wages, and the poor, financially unable to keep a single maid, are not concerned with the domestic service problem; but the thousands of families in neither one of these classes,
the families which are the back-bone of national life in all countries, are greatly disturbed by it. The crying need in household work to-day is for good, "all around" servants, and this is the demand which the Guild of Dames of the Household endeavors to satisfy.

Salaries in England are low for all kinds of work. Good stenographers may be had for $25.00 to $35.00 a month, not many receive the higher figure, therefore the compensation the dames receive, $6.50 to $17.00 a month, may be considered very good, especially when it is remembered that in addition they are given board and lodging. Nor is fancy cooking expected of them, only simple desserts and absolutely no ices, since English people consider them detrimental to health and regard their preparation as a most complicated performance—almost worthy of a place in the category of the black arts.

If, in the United States, along with a training school modeled after the one at Brabazon House, there could be a training school for mistresses, which would stand for uniform methods of household work, would regulate wages and hours of work, would educate the housekeepers upon the subject of giving truthful recommendation, would insist upon a standard of honor which would make it impossible for one mistress to entice away another's maid, and last, but by no means least, would emphasize the impertinence of attempting to regulate the maid's life down to the minutest detail, as is so frequently done by well-meaning but misguided women, peace, in time, would take the place of present strife.

Is it too wild a dream to imagine a home presided over by a sensible mistress, a graduate of such a school, and with the domestic machinery in the hands of a capable dame, who takes pride and conscious pleasure in her work, and who realizes that she is a valued member of society because she dignifies her profession? One of two things is very certain, either mistresses and maids must turn over a new leaf or we shall be forced to evolve a method of co-operative housekeeping.