

Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: MacMillan, 1907); 101-136.

## Chapter IV

### Household Adjustment

If we could only be judged or judge other people by purity of motive, life would be much simplified, but that would be to abandon the contention made in the first chapter, that the processes of life are as important as its aims. We can all recall acquaintances of whose integrity of purpose we can have no doubt, but who cause much confusion as they proceed to the accomplishment of that purpose, who indeed are often insensible to their own mistakes and harsh in their judgments of other people because they are so confident of their own inner integrity.

This tendency to be so sure of integrity of purpose as to be unsympathetic and hardened to the means by which it is accomplished, is perhaps nowhere so obvious as [end page 102] in the household itself. It nowhere operates as so constant a force as in the minds of the women who in all the perplexity of industrial transition are striving to administer domestic affairs. The ethics held by them are for the most part the individual and family codes, untouched by the larger social conceptions.

These women, rightly confident of their household and family integrity and holding to their own code of morals, fail to see the household in its social aspect. Possibly no relation has been so slow to respond to the social ethics which we are now considering, as that between the household employer and the household employee, or, as it is still sometimes called, that between mistress and servant.

This persistence of the individual code in relation to the household may be partly accounted for by the fact that orderly life and, in a sense, civilization itself, grew from the concentration of interest in one place, and that moral feeling first became centered in a limited number of persons. From the [end page 103] familiar proposition that the home began because the mother was obliged to stay in one spot in order to cherish the child, we can see a foundation for the belief that if women are much away from home, the home itself will be destroyed and all ethical progress endangered

We have further been told that the earliest dances and social gatherings were most questionable in their purposes, and that it was, therefore, the good and virtuous women who first stayed at home, until gradually the two-the woman who stayed at home and the woman who guarded her virtue-became synonymous. A code of ethics was thus developed in regard to woman's conduct, and her duties were logically and carefully limited to her own family circle. When it became impossible to adequately minister to the needs of this circle without the help of many people who did not strictly belong to the family, although they were part of the household, they were added as aids merely for supplying these needs.

When women were the brewers and bakers, the fullers, [end page 104] dyers, spinners, and weavers, the soap and candle makers, they administered large industries, but solely from the family point of view. Only a few hundred years ago, woman had complete control of the manufacturing of many commodities which now figure so largely in commerce, and it is evident that she let the manufacturing of these commodities go into the hands of men, as soon as organization and a larger conception of their production were required. She felt no responsibility for their management when they were taken from the home to the factory, for deeper than her instinct to manufacture food and clothing for her family was her instinct to stay with them, and by isolation and care to guard them from evil.

She had become convinced that a woman's duty extended only to her own family, and that the world outside had no claim upon her. The British matron ordered her maidens aright, when they were spinning under her own roof, but she felt

no compunction of conscience when the morals [end page 105] and health of young girls were endangered in the overcrowded and insanitary factories. The code of family ethics was established in her mind so firmly that it excluded any notion of social effort.

It is quite possible to accept this explanation of the origin of morals, and to believe that the preservation of the home is at the foundation of all that is best in civilization, without at the same time insisting that the separate preparation and serving of food is an inherent part of the structure and sanctity of the home, or that those who minister to one household shall minister to that exclusively. But to make this distinction seems difficult, and almost invariably the sense of obligation to the family becomes confused with a certain sort of domestic management. The moral issue involved in one has become inextricably combined with the industrial difficulty involved in the other, and it is at this point that so many perplexed housekeepers, through the confusion of the two [end page 106] problems, take a difficult and untenable position.

There are economic as well as ethical reasons for this survival of a simpler code. The wife of a workingman still has a distinct economic value to her husband. She cooks, cleans, washes, and mends-services for which, before his marriage, he paid ready money. The wife of the successful business or professional man does not do this. He continues to pay for his cooking, house service, and washing. The mending, however, is still largely performed by his wife; indeed, the stockings are pathetically retained and their darning given an exaggerated importance, as if women instinctively felt that these mended stockings were the last remnant of the entire household industry, of which they were formerly mistresses. But one industry, the cooking and serving of foods to her own family, woman has never relinquished. It has, therefore, never been organized, either by men or women, and is in an undeveloped [end page 107] state. Each employer of household labor views it solely from the family standpoint. The ethics prevailing in regard to it are distinctly personal and anti-social, and result in the unique isolation of the household employee.

As industrial conditions have changed, the household has simplified, from the mediaeval affair of journeymen, apprentices, and maidens who spun and brewed to the family proper; to those who love each other and live together in ties of affection and consanguinity. Were this process complete, we should have no problem of household employment. But, even in households comparatively humble, there is still one alien, one who is neither loved nor loving.

The modern family has dropped the man who made its shoes, the woman who spun its clothes, and, to a large extent, the woman who washes them, but it stoutly refuses to drop the woman who cooks its food and ministers directly to its individual comfort; it strangely insists that to do [end page 108] that would be to destroy the family life itself. The cook is uncomfortable, the family is uncomfortable; but it will not drop her as all her fellow-workers have been dropped, although the cook herself insists upon it. So far has this insistence gone that every possible concession is made to retain her. The writer knows an employer in one of the suburbs who built a bay at the back of her house so that her cook might have a pleasant room in which to sleep, and another in which to receive her friends. This employer naturally felt aggrieved when the cook refused to stay in her bay. Viewed in an historic light, this employer might quite as well have added a bay to her house for her shoemaker, and then deemed him ungrateful because he declined to live in it.

A listener, attentive to a conversation between two employers of household labor, and we certainly all have opportunity to hear such conversations,--would often discover a tone implying that the employer was abused [end page 109] and put upon; that she was struggling with the problem solely because she was thus serving her family and performing her social duties; that otherwise it would be a great relief to her to abandon the entire situation, and never have a servant in her house again." Did she follow this impulse, she would simply yield to the trend of her times and accept the present system of production. She would be in line with the industrial organization of her age. Were she in line ethically, she

would have to believe that the sacredness and beauty of family life do not consist in the processes of the separate preparation of food, but in sharing the corporate life of the community, and in making the family the unit of that life.

The selfishness of a modern mistress, who, in her narrow social ethics, insists that those who minister to the comforts of her family shall minister to it alone, that they shall not only be celibate, but shall be cut off, more or less, from their natural social ties, excludes the best working-people from her service. [end page 110]

A man of dignity and ability is quite willing to come into a house to tune a piano. Another man of mechanical skill will come to put up window shades. Another of less skill, but of perfect independence, will come to clean and relay a carpet. These men would all resent the situation and consider it quite impossible if it implied the giving up of their family and social ties, and living under the roof of the household requiring their services.

The isolation of the household employee is perhaps inevitable so long as the employer holds her belated ethics; but the situation is made even more difficult by the character and capacity of the girls who enter this industry. In any great industrial change the workmen who are permanently displaced are those who are too dull to seize upon changed conditions. The workmen who have knowledge and insight, who are in touch with their time, quickly reorganize.

The general statement may be made that the enterprising girls of the community go [end page 111] into factories, and the less enterprising go into households, although there are many exceptions. It is not a question of skill, of energy, of conscientious work, which will make a girl rise industrially while she is in the household; she is not in the rising movement. She is belated in a class composed of the unprogressive elements of the community, which is recruited constantly by those from the ranks of the incompetent, by girls who are learning the language, girls who are timid and

slow, or girls who look at life solely from the savings-bank point of view. The distracted housekeeper struggles with these unprogressive girls, holding to them not even the well-defined and independent relation of employer and employed, but the hazy and constantly changing one of mistress to servant.

The latter relation is changing under pressure from various directions. In our increasing democracy the notion of personal service is constantly becoming more distasteful, conflicting, as it does, with the more [end page 112] modern notion of personal dignity. Personal ministrations to the needs of childhood, illness, and old age seem to us reasonable, and the democratic adjustment in regard to them is being made. The first two are constantly raised nearer to the level of a profession, and there is little doubt that the third will soon follow. But personal ministrations to a normal, healthy adult, consuming the time and energy of another adult, we find more difficult to reconcile to our theories of democracy.

A factory employer parts with his men at the factory gates at the end of a day's work; they go to their homes as he goes to his, in the assumption that they both do what they want and spend their money as they please; but this solace of equality outside of working hours is denied the bewildered employer of household labor.

She is obliged to live constantly in the same house with her employee, and because of certain equalities in food and shelter she is brought more sharply face to face with the mental and social inequalities. [end page 113]

The difficulty becomes more apparent as the character of the work performed by the so-called servant is less absolutely useful and may be merely time consuming. A kind-hearted woman who will complacently take an afternoon drive, leaving her cook to prepare the five courses of a "little dinner for only ten guests," will not be nearly so comfortable the

next evening when she speeds her daughter to a dance, conscious that her waitress must spend the evening in dull solitude on the chance that a caller or two may ring the door-bell.

A conscientious employer once remarked to the writer: "In England it must be much easier; the maid does not look and dress so like your daughter, and you can at least pretend that she doesn't like the same things. But really, my new waitress is quite as pretty and stylish as my daughter is, and her wistful look sometimes when Mary goes off to a frolic quite breaks my heart."

Too many employers of domestic service have always been exempt from manual labor, [end page 114] and therefore constantly impose exacting duties upon employees, the nature of which they do not understand by experience; there is thus no curb of rationality imposed upon the employer's requirements and demands. She is totally unlike the foreman in a shop, who has only risen to his position by way of having actually performed with his own hands all the work of the men he directs. There is also another class of employers of domestic labor, who grow capricious and over-exacting through sheer lack of larger interests to occupy their minds; it is equally bad for them and the employee that the duties of the latter are not clearly defined. Tolstoy contends that an exaggerated notion of cleanliness has developed among such employers, which could never have been evolved among usefully employed people. He points to the fact that a serving man, in order that his hands may be immaculately clean, is kept from performing the heavier work of the household, and then is supplied with a tray, upon which to place a card, in [end page 115] order that even his clean hands may not touch it; later, even his clean hands are covered with a pair of clean white gloves, which hold the tray upon which the card is placed.

If it were not for the undemocratic ethics used by the employers of domestics, much work now performed in the household would be done outside, as is true of many products formerly manufactured in the feudal household. The worker in all other trades has complete control of his own time after the performance of definitely limited services, his wages are paid altogether in money which he may spend in the maintenance of a separate home life, and he has full opportunity to organize with the other workers in his trade.

The domestic employee is retained in the household largely because her "mistress" fatuously believes that she is thus maintaining the sanctity of family life.

The household employee has no regular opportunity for meeting other workers of her trade, and of attaining with them the dignity of a corporate body. The industrial isolation of the household employee results, as isolation in a trade must always result, in a lack of progress in the methods and products of that trade, and a lack of aspiration and education in the workman. Whether we recognize this isolation as a cause or not, we are all ready to acknowledge that household labor has been in some way belated; that the improvements there have not kept up with the improvement in other occupations. It is said that the last revolution in the processes of cooking was brought about by Count Rumford, who died a hundred years ago. This is largely due to the lack of esprit de corps among the employees which keeps them collectively from fresh achievements, as the absence of education in the individual keeps her from improving her implements.

Under this isolation, not only must one set of utensils serve diverse purposes", and, as a consequence, tend to a lessened volume and lower quality of work, but, inasmuch as the appliances are not made [end page 117] to perform the fullest work, there is an amount of capital invested disproportionate to the product when measured by the achievement in other

branches of industry. More important than this is the result of the isolation upon the worker herself. There is nothing more devastating to the inventive faculty, nor fatal to a flow of mind and spirit, than the constant feeling of loneliness and the absence of that fellowship which makes our public opinion. If an angry foreman reprimands a girl for breaking a machine, twenty other girls hear him, and the culprit knows perfectly well their opinion as to the justice or injustice of her situation. In either case she bears it better for knowing that, and not thinking it over in solitude. If a household employee breaks a utensil or a piece of porcelain and is reprimanded by her employer, too often the invisible jury is the family of the latter, who naturally uphold her censorious position and intensify the feeling of loneliness in the employee. [end page 118]

The household employee, in addition to her industrial isolation, is also isolated socially. It is well to remember that the household employees for the better quarters of the city and suburbs are largely drawn from the poorer quarters, which are nothing if not gregarious. The girl is born and reared in a tenement house full of children. She goes to school with them and there she learns to march, to read, and write in companionship with forty others. When she is old enough to go to parties, those she attends are usually held in a public hall and are crowded with dancers. If she works in a factory, she walks home with many other girls, in much the same spirit as she formerly walked to school with them. She mingles with the young men she knows, in frank, economic, and social equality. Until she marries she remains at home with no special break or change in her family and social life. If she is employed in a household, this is not true. Suddenly all the conditions of her [end page 119] life are altered. This change may be wholesome for her, but it is not easy, and thought of the savings-bank does not cheer one much, when one is twenty. She is isolated from the people with whom she has been reared, with whom she has gone to school, and among whom she expects to live when she marries. She is naturally lonely and constrained away from them, and the "new maid" often seems queer" to her employer's family. She

does not care to mingle socially with the people in whose house she is employed, as the girl from the country often does, but she suffers horribly from loneliness.

This wholesome, instinctive dread of social isolation is so strong that, as every city intelligence office can testify, the filling of situations is easier, or more difficult, in proportion as the place offers more or less companionship. Thus, the easy situation to fill is always the city house, with five or six employees, shading off into the more difficult suburban home, with two, [end page 120] and the utterly impossible lonely country house.

There are suburban employers of household labor who make heroic efforts to supply domestic and social life to their employees; who, take the domestic employee to drive, arrange to have her invited out occasionally; who supply her with books and papers and companionship. Nothing could be more praiseworthy in motive, but it is seldom successful in actual operation, resulting as it does in a simulacrum of companionship. The employee may have a genuine friendship for her employer, and pleasure in her companionship, or she may not have, and the unnaturalness of the situation comes from the insistence that she has, merely because of the propinquity.

The unnaturalness of the situation is intensified by the fact that the employee is practically debarred by distance and lack of leisure from her natural associates, and that her employer sympathetically insists upon filling the vacancy in interests [end page 121] and affections by her own tastes and friendship. She may or may not succeed, but the employee should not be thus dependent upon the good will of her employer. That in itself is undemocratic.

The difficulty is increasing by a sense of social discrimination which the household employee keenly feels is against her and in favor of the factory girls, in the minds of the young men of her acquaintance. Women seeking employment,

understand perfectly well this feeling among mechanics, doubtless quite unjustifiable, but it acts as a strong inducement toward factory labor. The writer has long ceased to apologize for the views and opinions of working people, being quite sure that on the whole they are quite as wise and quite as foolish as the views and opinions of other people, but that this particularly foolish opinion of young mechanics is widely shared by the employing class can be easily demonstrated. The contrast is further accentuated by the better social position of the factory girl, and the advantages provided for [end page 122] her in the way of lunch clubs, social clubs, and vacation homes, from which girls performing household labor are practically excluded by their hours of work, their geographical situation, and a curious feeling that they are not as interesting as factory girls.

This separation from her natural social ties affects, of course, her opportunity for family life. It is well to remember that women, as a rule, are devoted to their families; that they want to live with their parents, their brothers and sisters, and kinsfolk, and will sacrifice much to accomplish this. This devotion is so universal that it is impossible to ignore it when we consider women as employees. Young unmarried women are not detached from family claims and requirements as young men are, and are more ready and steady in their response to the needs of aged parents and the helpless members of the family. But women performing labor in households have peculiar difficulties in responding to their family [end page 123] claims, and are practically dependent upon their employers for opportunities of even seeing their relatives and friends.

Curiously enough the same devotion to family life and quick response to its claims, on the part of the employer, operates against the girl employed in household labor, and still further contributes to her isolation. The employer of household labor, in her zeal to preserve her own family life intact and free from intrusion, acts inconsistently and grants to her cook, for instance, but once or twice a week, such opportunity for untrammelled association with her relatives as the

employer's family claims constantly. This in itself is undemocratic, in that it makes a distinction between the value of family life for one set of people as over against another; or, rather, claims that one set of people are of so much less importance than another, that a valuable side of life pertaining to them should be sacrificed for the other.

This cannot be defended theoretically, and no doubt much of the talk among the em- [end page 124] ployers of household labor, that their employees are carefully shielded and cared for, and that it is so much better for a girl's health and morals to work in a household than to work in a factory, comes from a certain uneasiness of conscience, and from a desire to make up by individual scruple what would be done much more freely and naturally by public opinion if it had an untrammelled chance to assert itself. One person, or a number of isolated persons, however conscientious, cannot perform this office of public opinion. Certain hospitals in London have contributed statistics showing that seventy-eight per cent of illegitimate children born there are the children of girls working in households. These girls are certainly not less virtuous than factory girls, for they come from the same families and have had the same training, but the girls who remain at home and work in factories meet their lovers naturally and easily, their fathers and brothers know the men, and unconsciously exercise a certain supervision and a certain [end page 125] direction in their choice of companionship. The household employees living in another part of the city, away from their natural family and social ties, depend upon chance for the lovers whom they meet. The lover may be the young man who delivers for the butcher or grocer, or the solitary friend, who follows the girl from her own part of town and pursues unfairly the advantage which her social loneliness and isolation afford him. There is no available public opinion nor any standard of convention which the girl can apply to her own situation.

It would be easy to point out many inconveniences arising from the fact that the old economic forms are retained when moral conditions which befitted them have entirely disappeared, but until employers of domestic labor become

conscious of their narrow code of ethics, and make a distinct effort to break through the status of mistress and servant, because it shocks their moral sense, there is no chance of even beginning a reform. [end page 126]

A fuller social and domestic life among household employees would be steps toward securing their entrance into the larger industrial organizations by which the needs of a community are most successfully administered. Many a girl who complains of loneliness, and who relinquishes her situation with that as her sole excuse, feebly tries to formulate her sense of restraint and social mal-adjustment. She sometimes says that she "feels so unnatural all the time." The writer has known the voice of a girl to change so much during three weeks of "service" that she could not recognize it when the girl returned to her home. It alternated between the high falsetto in which a shy child "speaks a piece" and the husky gulp with which the *globus hystericus* is swallowed. The alertness and *bonhomie* of the voice of the tenement house child had totally disappeared. When such a girl leaves her employer, her reasons are often incoherent and totally incomprehensible to that good lady, who naturally [end page 127] concludes that she wishes to get away from the work and back to her dances and giddy life, content, if she has these, to stand many hours in an unsanitary factory. The charge of the employer is only half a truth. These dances may be the only organized form of social life which the disheartened employee is able to mention, but the girl herself, in her discontent and her moving from place to place, is blindly striving to respond to a larger social life. Her employer thinks that she should be able to consider only the interests and conveniences of her employer's family, because the employer herself is holding to a family outlook, and refuses to allow her mind to take in the larger aspects of the situation.

Although this household industry survives in the midst of the factory system, it must, of course, constantly compete with it. Women with little children, or those with invalids depending upon them, cannot enter either occupation, and they are

practically confined to the sewing trades; but [end page 128] to all other untrained women seeking employment a choice is open between these two forms of labor.

There are few women so dull that they cannot paste labels on a box, or do some form of factory work; few so dull that some perplexed housekeeper will not receive them, at least for a trial, in her household. Household labor, then, has to compete with factory labor, and women seeking employment, more or less consciously compare these two forms of labor in point of hours, in point of permanency of employment, in point of wages, and in point of the advantage they afford for family and social life. Three points are easily disposed of. First, in regard to hours, there is no doubt that the factory has the advantage. The average factory hours are from seven in the morning to six in the evening, with the chance of working overtime in busy seasons. This leaves most of the evenings and Sundays entirely free. the average hours of household labor are from six in the morning until eight at night, with [end page 129] little difference in seasons. There is one afternoon a week, with an occasional evening, but Sunday is seldom wholly free. Even these evenings and afternoons take the form of a concession from the employer. They are called "evenings out," as if the time really belonged to her, but that she was graciously permitting her employee to use it. This attitude, of course, is in marked contrast to that maintained by the factory operative, who, when she works evenings is paid for "over-time."

Second, in regard to permanency of position, the advantage is found clearly on the side of the household employee, if she proves in any measure satisfactory to her employer, for she encounters much less competition.

Third, in point of wages, the household is again fairly ahead, if we consider not the money received, but the opportunity offered for saving money. This is greater among household employees, because they do not pay board, the clothing required is simpler, and the temptation to spend money in [end page 130] recreation is less frequent. The minimum

wages paid an adult in household labor may be fairly put at two dollars and a half a week; the maximum at six dollars, this excluding the comparatively rare opportunities for women to cook at forty dollars a month, and the housekeeper's position at fifty dollars a month.

The factory wages, viewed from the savings-bank point of view, may be smaller in the average, but this is doubtless counterbalanced in the minds of the employees by the greater chance which the factory offers for increased wages. A girl over sixteen seldom works in a factory for less than four dollars a week, and always cherishes the hope of at last being a forewoman with a permanent salary of from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a week. Whether she attains this or not, she runs a fair chance of earning ten dollars a week as a skilled worker. A girl finds it easier to be content with three dollars a week, when she pays for board, in a scale of wages rising toward ten dollars, than to be [end page 131] content with four dollars a week and pay no board, in a scale of wages rising toward six dollars; and the girl well knows that there are scores of forewomen at sixty dollars a month for one forty-dollar cook or fifty-dollar housekeeper. In many cases this position is well taken economically, for, although the opportunity for saving may be better for the employees in the household than in the factory, her family saves more when she works in a factory and lives with them. The rent is no more when she is at home. The two dollars and a half a week which she pays into the family fund more than covers the cost of her actual food, and at night she can often contribute toward the family labor by helping her mother wash and sew.

The fourth point has already been considered, and if the premise in regard to the isolation of the household employee is well taken, and if the position can be sustained that this isolation proves the determining factor in the situation, then certainly an effort should be made to remedy this, at least in its domestic [end page 132] and social aspects. To allow household employees to live with their own families and among their own friends, as factory employees now do, would

be to relegate more production to industrial centers administered on the factory system, and to secure shorter hours for that which remains to be done in the household.

In those cases in which the household employees have no family ties, doubtless a remedy against social isolation would be the formation of residence clubs, at least in the suburbs, where the isolation is most keenly felt. Indeed, the beginnings of these clubs are already seen in the servants' quarters at the summer hotels. In these residence clubs, the household employee could have the independent life which only one's own abiding place can afford. This, of course, presupposes a higher grade of ability than household employees at present possess; on the other hand, it is only by offering such possibilities that the higher grades of intelligence can be secured for household employ- [end page 133] ment. As the plan of separate clubs for household employees will probably come first in the suburbs, where the difficulty of securing and holding servants " under the present system is most keenly felt, so the plan of buying cooked food from an outside kitchen, and of having more and more of the household product relegated to the factory, will probably come from the comparatively poor people in the city, who feel most keenly the pressure of the present system. They already consume a much larger proportion of canned goods and bakers' wares and "prepared meats" than the more prosperous people do, because they cannot command the skill nor the time for the more tedious preparation of the raw material. The writer has seen a tenement-house mother pass by a basket of green peas at the door of a local grocery store, to purchase a tin of canned peas, because they could be easily prepared for supper and the children liked the tinny taste."

It is comparatively easy for an employer to manage her household industry with a [end page 134] cook, a laundress, a waitress. The difficulties really begin when the family income is so small that but one person can be employed in the household for all these varied functions, and the difficulties increase and grow almost insurmountable as they fall altogether upon the mother of the family, who is living in a flat, or, worse still, in a tenement house, where one stove and

one set of utensils must be put to all sorts of uses, fit or unfit, making the living room of the family a horror in summer, and perfectly insupportable on rainy washing-days in winter. Such a woman, rather than the prosperous housekeeper, uses factory products, and thus no high standard of quality is established.

The problem of domestic service, which has long been discussed in the United States and England, is now coming to prominence in France. As a well-known economist has recently pointed out, the large defection in the ranks of domestics is there regarded as a sign of revolt against an "unconscious slavery," while English and [end page 135] American writers appeal to the statistics which point to the absorption of an enormous number of the class from which servants were formerly recruited into factory employment, and urge, as the natural solution, that more of the products used in households be manufactured in factories, and that personal service, at least for healthy adults, be eliminated altogether. Both of these lines of discussion certainly indicate that domestic service is yielding to the influence of a democratic movement, and is emerging from the narrower code of family ethics into the larger code governing social relations. It still remains to express the ethical advance through changed economic conditions by which the actual needs of the family may be supplied not only more effectively but more in line with associated effort. To fail to apprehend the tendency of one's age, and to fail to adapt the conditions of an industry to it, is to leave that industry ill-adjusted and belated on the economic side, and out of line ethically. [end page 136]