

**THE ECONOMICS OF THE
HOUSEHOLD: SIX LECTURES
GIVEN AT THE LONDON
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS**

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The Economics of the Household: Six Lectures given at the London School of Economics by
Louise Creighton

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LOUISE CREIGHTON

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"The surest sign of social progress is increasing interest in the generation that is to come."

MANDELL CREIGHTON.



PREFACE.

THESE lectures were given during the winter of 1906 at the London School of Economics, to the teachers of Domestic Economy under the London County Council, and are now printed at the request of those who heard them. Their object was to bring the teachers into contact with some of the thought and knowledge on the great social problems with which their subject is concerned. I wished to give a background, a setting to their work, to make them feel the greatness, the infinite importance of the problems they touch, and to show them what kind of influence they may have in improving the homes of London. As one of them said to me, I aimed at showing them "where they came in". I tried to make them feel how big their subject really is. It is difficult in the press of daily work, in the constant strain of the management of large classes to remember this, and not to become absorbed simply in getting the

child to make a rabbit pie or a milk pudding satisfactorily, and forget that it is not a cook whom you are training, or a child whom you are keeping in order, but a woman whom you are preparing for the complicated profession of wife and mother. It would be too much to expect that our teachers, in the midst of the exhausting demands made upon them by their daily work, should find much time to study the problems of London. In these lectures an attempt has been made to bring some of these problems before their notice, and to tell them something of the investigations and opinions of those who have studied our social conditions. I have tried in so doing to make the teachers realise the possibilities and the opportunities of their work. The interest that they showed in the lectures, and the eager desire of those who organise their work to develop its usefulness, seem to me full of hope for the future. So long as methods and results continue to be carefully observed and criticised, so long as there is readiness to try new experiments, and a full realisation of the danger of settling down into a deadly routine, we can hope much from the domestic economy teaching in London. We must not expect to see its effect too quickly, but we can confidently regard it as one of the most im-

portant amongst the many agencies at work to improve the home life of London.

In trying to make clear the conditions of life which now prevail amongst large classes of our population, it has been impossible not to speak strongly about the incapacity and apathy of many of the women in all classes. I should like to remind the teachers that this incapacity and apathy can seldom be looked upon as the fault of the individual woman. It is the result of the circumstances that surround her. But she can be helped to rise superior to her circumstances and be shown how she may modify them. It is a counsel of despair to say that we can expect no improvement from her until her circumstances are changed. That this is not so is shown by the many women who, under hard and difficult circumstances, have brought up their families well and made their homes happy and comfortable. We must wish to improve their circumstances, we must try to realise their almost insuperable difficulties, we must go to them with the sympathy which wishes to understand rather than to judge, there must be no harsh spirit of criticism in us, and yet, if we would really be of service, there must be an undying faith in the possibilities of human nature. What some have done, others can be helped to do;

difficulties can be removed out of their way, above all, those difficulties caused by bad habits, by the loss of hope and interest in their lives. I would ask the domestic economy teachers never to weary of trying to understand their pupils and the homes of their pupils, not in a spirit of criticism but in a spirit of loving sympathy. Their subject is one of the most important in all the curriculum of our elementary schools, not only because of the effect it may have if rightly taught upon the homes of the people, but because of its educational value. It touches life at every point, it can only be well taught by those who are in living sympathy with the world around them. All teaching must deteriorate when the teacher ceases to grow and develop, but of no teaching is this so true as of the teaching which tries to show how to organise life in the midst of our complicated urban civilisation. To give material things their right place, to see how they can be used in the development of higher things, this is no easy task. It can be learnt from no text-book, at no training college, it must be the expression of a life lived with a high purpose, of an understanding ready to learn from everything around, of a heart quick to sympathise with every kind of character and circumstance.