

PROGRESS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

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Progress in the household by Lucy Maynard Salmon

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APOLOGIA

IN 1897 the author of these sketches published a book entitled "Domestic Service." It was an attempt to consider certain historical and economic aspects of a common occupation and its aim was to induce others to investigate by scientific processes a neglected field of inquiry. It distinctly disclaimed any and all attempts to square the circle by proposing a plan to do away with all difficulties in the present condition of household service.

The book was not one of "the six best sellers" of the season, it was never duplicated by a public library, and it never secured a lodgment at the Tabard Inn. A modest second edition, not yet exhausted, represents its present rating in the authors' "Bradstreet's." The book was a disappointment to many housewives who had noted

its appearance because they had hoped to find in it a sovereign remedy for all domestic ills. Instead of that they found only rather repellant footnotes, statistical tables, appendices, and bibliographies. "What connection," they probably asked, "exists between the far-away fact that there is one domestic employee to every one hundred and fifty-six inhabitants in Oklahoma and the near-at-hand fact that there is a dearth of good cooks in Pantopia?" But Moses Coit Tyler, *beatissima memoria*, once instructed a class of college seniors about to begin the study of certain works in English literature that the initial step in all literary criticism was to find the author's object and to judge him by his success in attaining that object; that an artist who intends to paint a landscape must be judged by his success in landscape painting, and not criticised because the landscape is not a figure piece. To the charge therefore that a book of three hundred odd pages contained no panacea with virtues attested by hundreds

of housekeepers whose domestic ills had been cured by its application, the apologetic answer might be made that the writer professed to be only a seeker after facts, not a domestic physician, — she therefore craved judgment on the facts collected, not on the cure-all unsought and therefore unexploited.

But the author had secretly craved a hearing from the economists, although conscious that she was not one of the guild and therefore might be open to the charge of trespassing on the domain of others. She had also secretly hoped for a hearing from her fellow-workers in the field of history, although conscious that the proportion of history to economics in the book was in inverse ratio. Gaining admission to the salon, however, does not prevent the work of an amateur from being “skyped,” and “Domestic Service” was hung above the line. To the economists whose attention may have been called to the book, it doubtless seemed unreasonable that one who