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EDITORIAL

THE UNSPEAKABLE SERVANT GIRL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AND now it is a Philadelphia purveyor of doctored news which has come to the rescue of the down-trodden householder as against the unspeakable servant girl. In a five-inch-high dado to its rear-most page, this staid journal of the "City of Homes" pictures the *ne plus ultra* of servant girl viciousness. This, it is borne in upon one in a series of excruciatingly silly cartoons, is the demanding—and apparently succeeding in getting—a weekly afternoon off.

Other alleged charges there are, as absurd when applied to serving girls as a class, as they are slanderous: that the girls abstract sundry articles with them, and that they disseminate damaging information concerning their mistresses, for instance. Apparently the man who spends his days grazing the point of the law by so fine a hair that he falls not within its clutches, and the woman who smuggles home from Paris the gowns in which to deliver addresses on Civic Purity, object most strenuously when the maid of all work does anything which even remotely can be thought to smack of a similar line of conduct. Gossip, also, must be confined within the select circles of army-officers' wives or roadway inn frequenters. But this matter of afternoons off is the main blot on the serving girl's apron.

It surely is a sign of utter depravity to want a single minute in the week for rest, recreation, or intellectual leisure. As Nietzsche has said, if people "want to have slaves, it is foolish to educate them to be masters." Let no serving girl have time to think! There are (Census of 1900) 1,165,561 of her in the country. Considering that in many cases there are more than one to an employer, the engagers of servant girls can in no wise number more than 1,000,000; chances are there are far fewer. A close estimate puts the adult male population at 21,000,000, not all of whom, of course, are heads of families. Who are the fortunate 1,000,000 out of this 21,000,000 who are able to hire help in their homes? Obviously, the

richest, i.e., the idlest million in the whole land. Yet they howl like stuck pigs when their serving girls win an afternoon off.

That

“Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do”

is probably as true now as it was in the days of Cotton Mather and Jeremy Bentham of the “woman has no soul” school of political theologians. But that does not mean that one’s time must be spent from daylight till dark in the meanest and most servile manual drudgery. If it does, our million employers of servant girls better change their frock coats for overalls. “What a chance!” as the boys say.

The unspeakable servant girl is making her mark. The measure of her “unspeakableness” is the measure in which she demands her birthright of plenty and leisure. May her unspeakableness, like her shadow, never grow less.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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