

**WORK AND WAGES: OR,
LIFE IN SERVICE: A
CONTINUATION OF "LITTLE
COIN, MUCH CARE"**

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Work and Wages: Or, Life in Service: A Continuation Of "Little Coin, Much Care" by Mary Howitt

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A CONTINUATION OF "LITTLE COIN, MUCH CARE."

BY MARY HOWITT,

AUTHOR OF

"SWEET AND SWEET," "HOP ON! HOP OVER!" "SOWING AND REAPING,"
"WHO SHALL BE GREAT?" "WHICH IS THE WISE?"
"LITTLE COIN, MUCH CARE," &c. &c.

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WORK AND WAGES, OR, LIFE IN SERVICE.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS SHE? NOTHING BUT A MAID-SERVANT!

NEVER in this world was servant-girl more tired than was the Miss Cotterills' Peggy on that Thursday afternoon which concluded her servitude with them. Every room in the house, and every corner of every room, had now been thoroughly cleaned. Peggy had lived only six weeks with the Miss Cotterills, and the same operations had been performed by her predecessor before her arrival. The house did not want this cleaning—so the Miss Cotterills themselves said—but then it was a penance they demanded from every servant before leaving, and why should Peggy be exempted, though she did complain so much of that pain in her right knee, when she went down on her knees to scour? No—Peggy, they said, was afraid of work, and they never would break through a good rule. So the house was cleaned from top to bottom, every carpet taken up, and every floor scoured; and poor Peggy, who had an incipient white swelling, had thus her terrible complaint confirmed. But what a beautifully clean house was the Miss Cotterills'! Every piece of earthen-

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ware and china had been carefully washed; every article of tin, brass, and copper elaborately scoured and polished, even to the thirty-years-old tea-kettle, which, having had three holes in it for the last ten years, served now only for show, whilst the parlour coal-scuttle, a sort of household idol, shone in its corner as if made of red gold. All this being done, Peggy sat down on the clean kitchen hearth, tired and spiritless: she had not got another place, and her home, which was governed by a step-father, was a joyless one to return to.

Peggy sat down, and determined with herself that for the future she never would take service with single ladies again: they were so exact, so suspicious; they had nothing to do but to peep about and pry into everything; and, if they miscounted the lumps of sugar in the sugar-basin, they were sure to say you had taken some; and if you did carry hot water into your miserably cold bed-room in a stone bottle, to warm your poor feet in bed, didn't they say you had taken into your bed-room a bottle of beer to drink? and if you did chance to have a little brooch given you by a friend, or a pink ribbon which you had made into loops for your Sunday bonnet-cap, were not they sure, some day or other, when you were out, to go and rummage among your things, and find them, and then fly into your very face with them the moment you entered the house, taking you so by surprise that you had not a word to say for yourself!

No; poor Peggy resolved that she never would live again with a couple of single ladies; and, if she could only get speech of the new servant this evening, she would tell her, as sure as she was alive, what sort of people she was going to live with. Perhaps the Miss Cotterills suspected something of this kind; for, no sooner had Peggy formed this determination than the

elder of the two walked into the kitchen, and, seeing Peggy sitting by the fire with her hands on her knees, inquired what in the world she meant by doing so? Was it not then four o'clock? and had she not been ordered to be off by five? While Miss Cotterill was thus speaking, the second sister entered likewise, and took up her sister's last words—"By five you were to be off, and there you sit as if you had no life in you."

It was not quite true that Peggy was then sitting, for she had risen from her seat the moment Miss Cotterill entered; she offered no defence, however, but, taking up a little brown jug, drew some hot water from the boiler, and said quietly she would be ready to be off in half an hour. Peggy disarmed her mistresses by her quiet inoffensive manner, and going into her garret immediately. They too stood by the kitchen fire, and, looking round, said they must confess that everything was very clean, and that would be a good lesson to the new girl as to the way in which everything must be kept.

In half an hour Peggy came down again, carrying a small deal box, and a bundle in her hand, which she set in a corner of the kitchen, as much out of the way as possible, and then, five minutes afterwards, came down in her bonnet and shawl, and with a bonnet-box, tied up in an apron, in her hand. Her worldly possessions were all there, and Peggy was very poor. She then filled the tea-kettle and set it on the fire, ready for the ladies' tea, and, meekly making a courtesy, said she was ready to go. The Miss Cotterills glanced at the Dutch-clock on the wall, and saw that it wanted five minutes to five; they told her, therefore, that she had better get tea for them before she went, and when it was ready they would pay her her wages. The two mistresses went into the parlour, whilst Peggy, who had hurried herself so much to get ready, took off her

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bonnet and shawl again—not unreluctantly either, for she thought they would perhaps give her her tea before she went, which would be much better than going home hungry. She took in the tea things, the kettle, and the spirit-lamp; and Miss Agatha, whose quarter it now was to manage the housekeeping affairs, paid her her few shillings of wages, and then graciously told her that, in consideration of her youth, and of her having latterly done her work pretty well, they were willing to pass over her faults—to say nothing about the missing white sugar, nor about the beer-bottle found in her bed-room, nor about the pink ribbon in her cap, nor the sweetheart she was suspected of having, but to give her a general good character. The ladies had threatened the very reverse of this, and so poor Peggy dropped a courtesy and felt very grateful.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,” said He who understood better than any other living being the philosophy of social life; and poor Peggy’s meekness touched the cold suspicious hearts of these two ladies. “There’s no need to give her her tea,” said Miss Agatha, when she was out of the room, putting her suggestion into a negative form, as if to solicit a negative reply.

“I dare say she made a good dinner,” returned the elder; “and yet it is a cold day, and her family are miserably poor. Shall I ring for her?”

“Just as you please,” said Miss Agatha. Her sister rung, and Peggy, in her bonnet and shawl, again entered. Miss Agatha poured some weak tea into the slop-basin, and, smearing a slice of bread with the smallest possible quantity of butter, gave them to her.

Why did tears start into the poor girl’s eyes? and why, five minutes afterwards, when she met on the door-steps the new maid-servant, did she not say one word to the disadvantage of her mistresses, although,