The Home Department

Conducted by Helen Watts McVey

The Song of the Shirt.

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread.
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt;
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the Song of the Shirt:

Work! work! work!
While the cock is crowing aloof;
And work—work—work,
Till the stars shine through the roof.
It's O, to be a slave
Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save,
If this is Christian work.

Work—work—work,
Till the brain begins to swim;
Work—work—work,
Till the eyes are heavy and dim.
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
And sew them on in a dream.

O, men, with sisters dear!
O, men, with mothers and wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives.
Stitch—stitch—stitch,
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
Sewing at once with a double thread,
A shroud as well as a shirt.

But why do I talk of Death?
That phantom of grisly bone;
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own;
Because of the fasts I keep—
O, God! that bread should be so dear
And flesh and blood so cheap!

Work—work—work,
My labor never flags;
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread, and rags.
That shattered roof, and this naked floor,
A table, a broken chair;
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there.

Work—work—work,
From weary chime to chime;
Work—work—work,
As prisoners work for crime.
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Till the heart is sick, and the brain benumbed,
As well as the weary hand.

Work—work—work,
In the dull December light;
And work—work—work,
When the weather is warm and bright.
While underneath the eaves
The brooding swallows cling,
As if to show me their pretty backs,
And twit me with the Spring.

Oh, but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and the primrose sweet;
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet,
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want,
And the walk that costs a meal.

O, but for one short hour!
A respite, however brief.
No blessed leisure for love or hope,
But only time for grief.
A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread.

—Thomas Hood.

Child Labor.

It is estimated that there are over two million children earning bread in this country. We, who buy our goods at the bargain stores, bowing down to the god of cheapness, are not only responsible for these, but for the other millions of underpaid girl-clerks and sewing women who are going the broad road every year by thousands, out of sheer desperation. We do not realize our culpability in the matter as we should if we were brought into closer contact with these pitiably underpaid workers, and could see the matter in its true light. The child-earned dollar—the bread earned by little children whose teeth are not strong enough to dent its crust, and the dollar saved at the bargain counter and in the ready-made clothing departments which is wrung from the poor earnings of the silent clerks and sewing women, costs the nation a great deal more than it will ever buy.

There is a heavy discount on these dollars. It is like blood-money. It may put a little more butter on the family loaf, or a little more trimming on the occasional family dresses; the wee or the weak shoulder at the wheel and the frail hand at the rope may be—and, alas; too often are—the only way of keeping the wagon out of the mire; it may cool the fever and wipe the eyes of the often overburdened mother—the hope of a hopeless home, and the one drop of rain from a brazen sky, but it is a sacrifice and a sin for which, somewhere, somebody must some day pay a fearful cost.

Hood's Song of the Shirt is a song of today; it is a song for all time, and should appeal to every citizen with a force that should compel a closer knowledge of the workings of such a system of labor as is now in vogue, and a realizing sense of the duty we owe to our children and to the world. —Exchange.

For The Girls.

A neat kitchen outfit for the lassie who likes to help mamma about her work is made of calico, gingham, sateen or other washable material. There should be several suits, as we all know how prone to "get into the wash" such things are. A full skirt, reaching to the bottom of, and completely covering, the dress-skirt, is finished with a neat hem at the bottom and the top is gathered and sewed to the lower edge of a belt; to fasten this belt behind, either long strings or button and hole may be used. A large bib, covering the whole front of dress waist, is attached to the top front of the belt, and straps extend from this over the shoulders and are fastened to the ends of the belt. A pair of sleeves of scant fullness, extending from the wrist to above the elbow, finished at both top and bottom with a suitable hem, with a "sheer," or set-on casing about an inch from the hem, in which to run a piece of elastic, is drawn over the dress sleeves, the hem below the casing serving as a ruffle. A large circular piece of thin goods, hemmed on the edge, with a "sheer" or casing an inch or more further in, in which to run a bit of elastic, serves as a cap to pull over the hair after the manner of a dust-cap. Serviceable "half-handers" for the protection of the little hands may be made from the tops of black stockings, with a bit of elastic run in a sheering at the wrist. Does not she look sweet?

Paying Cash.

It would be a good thing if the families of a neighborhood would band together, pledging themselves to buy nothing on credit; to pay cash for every purchase, no matter how their "credit" stood, thus literally living within their means. Pecuniary indebtedness for current living is not desirable, and, although voluntary indebtedness is well-nigh universal, it is yet one of the greatest evils extant. Very few people really have to go in debt for necessities. It is the purchase of the unnecessary which calls for credit. One's necessities are really very few, when closely pinned down, if every one would make up his or her mind to buy nothing without paying for it on the instant; it is really wonderful to what a small compass their wants would shrink. If everybody would adopt the cash system, there would be little cry of "hard times," for every one, knowing the exact state of the individual finances, would govern the purchase accordingly and the necessary would take precedence over the mere fancy. The credit system is responsible for an immense amount of unhappiness, loss and ill-feeling between friends. The good the system may do is greatly overbalanced by the evil it has done, is doing and will continue to do, so long as it is allowed.

The Window Garden.

It does seem a little premature, talking of the window garden in the first days of August, but right now is the time to 'say things," that you may begin to think of it in time. It is all nonsense to say that "anybody can have a fine show of thrifty plants in winter" with little or no trouble. Everything of real value in this world requires time and trouble for its achievement, and plants are like children—they must have the right care at the right time, or they will not thrive. To be sure, if you have plenty of money, and the right "conditions," you may get your plants later from the greenhouse of the florist, but if the dollar is not forthcoming, and free slips are, they should be started early in August; they must be making thrifty growth by the early September days, and you must have them ready to stand the ordinary "house" conditions, by accustoming them to the new quarters before they are driven indoors by the threats of frost.

No class of plants is more attractive than the trailers; they occupy little room, and their suspended condition exhibits them at their best. Nothing is daintier than a thrifty, well chosen hanging basket. But plants suspended in the heated upper air of the living room, exposed to rapid evaporation, requires plentiful and judicious watering. If your hanging basket is yet to be started, now is a good time to set about it.

Sterilizing The Milk For Baby.

Several Querists, having read of the importance of sterilizing (Pasteurizing) milk for the baby, have applied to me for information regarding the method employed to effect the desired result. As the Query Box is devoted to brief answers, I have thought best to give the desired information in a separate article of greater length than the limited space of the "Box" would allow.

All "bottle" babies have more or less trouble, unless the mother is careful, painstaking and intelligent, and often, these qualities fail because of some side complication which has been overlooked. But one cannot be too careful, where baby is concerned.

The simplest plan, and the least expensive, is to take a tin pail having a close-fitting cover, invert in its bottom a perforated pie-tin, or have a false bottom or rack made to fit into it, in order to keep the vessels containing the milk from resting on the bottom of the bucket. A hole may be punched in the cover of the pail, a cork inserted, and a chemical thermometer put through the cork so that its bulb may dip into the water and the temperature of the water thus known without lifting the cover. An ordinary dairy thermometer may be used, removing the cover from time to time to test the heat, but the other way is less trouble. Put in the pail sufficient water to reach the level of the milk in the vessels containing it, and set the bottles on the false bottom, putting the lid on tightly. If bottles are used, they should be plugged with absorbent, or other clean cotton; a small fruit jar, loosely covered, may be used; but whatever vessels are used should be kept scrupulously sweet and clean.

There are sterilizing apparatuses on the market, that are not at all expensive, and with care one of these will last a long time, and be of very great service, not only for baby, but may be put to other uses. These consist of a metal (usually tin) vessel, with rack holding eight graduated bottles, and cleaning brush, which may be had for $1.50. The amount of water to be put in the vessel is indicated by a beading on the inside, and into this water is set the rack containing the bottles of milk, the vessel closely covered, and set over the fire until the water reaches a temperature of 155 degrees, when it is removed from the heat and the bottles left in the covered vessel of water for half an hour and then removed to some cool place. The milk may be used any time within twenty-four hours.

Physicians tell us that a temperature of 150 degrees Fahrenheit, maintained for half an hour, is sufficient to destroy germ life in milk, and raising the temperature to 155 degrees and then letting it cool slowly, insures the proper temperature for the desired result. If the temperature of the water is raised above 155 degrees, the quality of the milk is injured. This sterilizing outfit is the safest, and least trouble, and if a self-addressed envelope, stamped, is sent to me, I will give the name of the firm where they may be obtained. Business addresses may not be given in this department. Absorbent cotton may be had for 20 cents per pound; the sterilizer bottles, annealed, flint glass, made to stand repeated heating and cooling, will cost about 75 cents per dozen, and the brush for cleaning, 8 to 12 cents. Rubber nipples, to fit over the bottle, may be had at from 30 to 50 cents per dozen. A very careful mother may use the long rubber tube for the bottle, but ordinarily, its use is, to be discouraged, as it is often carelessly cleaned if cleaned at all, and great harm results to the baby. The rubber nipple must be turned inside out and brushed with a soft tooth brush in soap suds, rinsing it well with borax solution. "Nothing is too good or too clean for baby." Wash and scald the bottles as soon as empty, laying them in the sun until needed again. They may be thoroughly cleansed by putting into them some sharp, small gravel with the suds, shaking thoroughly, and rinsing perfectly clear with a solution of baking soda, or borax.

Requested Recipes.

A plain white sauce, or drawn butter, is made as follows: Melt one rounded tablespoonful of butter in a sauce-pan, and let boil until it shows