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*D*OROTHY *D*IX

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8 Dec. 69

TO ELIZABETH MERIWETHER
GILMER (Dorothy Dix) millions of
women and hundreds of thousands of men,
the world around, look for advice on those
intimate problems that vex the human soul. She is
the mother confessor of those who have strayed from
the narrow path; the big sister of the troubled and
perplexed.

No other woman has had such a background, such
a training for intimate writing of this class.

"I was born," she says, "at Woodstock, a farm on
the border between Tennessee and Kentucky. In our
household was a half-demented old man, a pensioner
of my grandfather and the prototype of Mr. Dick in
'David Copperfield.' He taught me to read and that
made me free to enjoy a fine old classical library.
Before I was twelve I knew my Shakespeare and
Scott and Dickens by heart and had read Smollett
and Fielding and Richardson—had even toyed with
the works of Josephus and Motley's 'Dutch Republic,'
'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' and
other airy literary trifles like that.

"I had no mushy children's books to read, and so
I cut my teeth on the solid meat of good literature,
for which mercy I thank God. Later I was sent to a
female academy, where, at sixteen, I was graduated
in all the ologies and isms, and in a love of a white
organdie dress; but whatever real education I got, I
found in the yellow old books in the library at Wood-
stock.

"Having finished school, I tucked up my hair and
got married, as was the tribal custom among my peo-
ple, expecting to settle down on Main Street, and
spend my life as a Main Streeter; but fate had other
plans for me. A series of financial and domestic
catastrophes chucked me out into the world, not only

to earn my own living, but to support others. I did not know a thing on earth to do to make a dollar, and I agonized over the horror of dependence, until I grew ill and was sent to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to recuperate.

"DESTINY—and I believe in Kismet as implicitly as any Mohammedan—put me into the house next door to Mrs. E. J. Nicholson, the great woman who owned and edited the New Orleans Picayune. I showed her a little story I had written, and she bought it for \$3.00, which I still believe to be the largest sum ever paid for any literary composition. Anyway, my fate was sealed, for I promptly 'wished myself' on the Picayune, and my newspaper career began.

"I had a passion for newspaper work, and I set about learning my trade with the zeal of a fanatic. I studied the backs off books of synonyms, and word books, and dictionaries. I memorized editorials that I liked. I followed big stories in every part of the country to see which paper played them up best. I dissected the work of the leading paragraphists to find what made them snappy. I lived newspapers, I ate newspapers, I dreamed newspapers and I dare say I shall go on doing this until I die, for when you are born with that thirst for printer's ink, there is no cure for it until death writes '30' at the bottom of your life copy.

"Part of my work on the Picayune consisted in writing every week an article for women. I pondered for a long time on what line I should take; and then it came to me that everything in the world had been written about women and for women, except the truth. They had been celebrated as angels. They had been pitied as martyrs. They had been advised to be human doormats. I knew that women knew that they

were not angels, and that they were tired of being martyrs and doormats. They were fed up on fulsome flattery and weary of suffering and being strong.

"SO I began writing for my sex the truth, as I have seen it, about the relationship of men and women. I called these articles the 'Dorothy Dix Talks,' and women liked them. So for the last quarter-century I have laughed and cried and sympathized with and jollied, and lambasted, and advised, millions upon millions of my sisters with whom I have had heart-to-heart talks through the papers the world over.

"I have been the confidante of the women who keep brothels and the girls in them. I have sat in prison cells and listened to the heart stories of murderers and have sat in luxurious drawing rooms while the guest of millionaires' wives. I have seen women in their moments of triumph and in their hours of despair; and there is no joy or sorrow that can tear at the human heart that I do not know. All of this has given me a knowledge and an understanding of human nature that no young girl or woman who has led just a home life could have.

"I take my work very seriously. If a preacher has a congregation of a couple of hundred people on Sunday he thinks he has a good audience. If he preaches to a thousand people on Sunday, we consider him a popular preacher, and speak of his great influence. Without vanity, I may say that every day I talk to millions of men and women who read the daily papers, all the way from New York to South Africa, and from London to Shanghai—wherever papers are published in the English language.

"To me it seems a very grave matter what women will read in the privacy of their homes while they are

rocking the baby to sleep; what working girls will read as they go and come from their work; what men will read while trying to find some key that will unlock the riddle of that human conundrum to which they are married, and what men and women will read in the stress of great emotional upheavals, when they are sorely buffeted by temptation.

“**T**O ALL of these people I have tried to make Dorothy Dix a personal friend to whom they will always turn for sympathy and counsel; and so my desk has become a confessional at which men and women open their hearts and tell me the secrets they would not tell their nearest and dearest, and at which they ask advice upon every subject under the sun, from how to reduce their weight, to whether they shall elope with their stenographers, or their best friends' husbands. Many of the problems are so intricate that only Almighty wisdom itself can solve them; but to all I give understanding, and the best advice I have in the shop.

“Often a tired and discouraged woman will write to me that something I have written has made her see that raising a family is a great and glorious career for a woman, and that it has given her fresh courage to go on with the dull monotony of the daily grind in a poor household. Doctors often write to me that they give my articles to their neurotic feminine patients instead of pills and potions. A girl will write to me that something I have written has kept her from setting her feet on the downward path. Often married men and women write to me that I have kept them from committing the sin and folly of thinking they can find happiness in the double life. And often bridal couples write and ask for my blessing, and say that they are going to play the matrimonial game according to Dorothy Dix.

“**T**HESE letters are the most amazing human documents that were ever written, and as they flow across my desk in an endless stream, I am given such a glimpse of the human heart as perhaps no other human being has ever been privileged to see. It is a cross section of life, raw and bleeding, with nothing covered up, nothing hidden. Some of the letters are written by souls in torment. I can imagine men and women getting up from beds on which they have tossed sleeplessly to try to ease their overburdened hearts by writing me of temptations they are fighting, of crimes they have committed, of sins they are contemplating, or dark secrets that they can bear alone no more.

“Nothing much has happened in my life but work. Four years after I got my first job on the New Orleans Picayune I was invited by William Randolph Hearst to join his staff. So in 1901 I went on the Journal in New York where for twenty years I not only kept up the Dorothy Dix Talks—they have an unbroken record now of having been published over 39 years without missing an issue, a Marathon record for a newspaper feature—but I did all sorts of human interest stories. I reported all the big murder trials, the Thaw case, the Nan Patterson, the Patrick, the Ruth Wheeler cases—dozens of them.

“Desiring to devote myself to the Dorothy Dix Talks which I hoped I could make helpful to my day and generation, I left the Journal and went to the Wheeler Syndicate—and from that I transferred to the Ledger Syndicate which still handles my stuff.

“I have published a number of books—‘Fables for the Elite,’ two Mirandy Books, ‘My Joy Ride Around the World,’ and ‘Dorothy Dix, Her Book,’ a collection of my daily talks.”

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