

## LEISURE HOURS.

By THE HON. MRS. ROBERT BUTLER.



WOMAN'S province is her home, and to rule her home with justice, and by that gentle influence which is the recognised prerogative of her sex, is her mission in life.

Pages might be written on method, industry, consistency, unselfishness, and all the different agencies that help in the fulfilment of this mission; but I am now going to give my readers a few words of advice on one special help only, which a girl can best acquire the power of accomplishing during the priceless years that follow her emancipation from the regular routine of the schoolroom, and precede her embarkation upon the duties and responsibilities of a home of her own.

Goethe says—"We are apt to suffer the mean things of life to overgrow the finer nature within us, therefore it is expedient that at least once a day we read a little poetry, or sing a song, or look at a picture." And this saying of Goethe's is more applicable to the mistress of a household than to any other of the fellow-creatures for whose benefit he wrote it.

A girl naturally looks forward to a home of her own in the "viewless-fated future," for its possession is the destiny of most women; but in looking forward to it, little does she realise the duties and responsibilities that appertain to it. The home may be smoothed with the luxury of wealth, and hallowed with the presence of love. She may enter it a young wife, full of that light-heartedness and joyousness which belong only to those whose nature and circumstances have sheltered them from the blasts of life; or, on the other hand, she may enter it as an elderly spinster, experienced in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, and other adversities; but, in either case, if that home is to be well directed, if woman's mission is to be faithfully fulfilled there, she must perform special duties, to which she has hitherto been a stranger. She will have to look into every little petty detail of life, and in most duties she will find a corresponding snare that will demand all her vigilance and self-control not to fall into.

She will have to restrain wastefulness in her servants, without becoming mean herself; she will have to correct the faults of her children, without indulging in the temptation of spoiling them; she will have to curb negligence and bad humour when she sees it, without losing her own patience, and in spite of black looks, sometimes, and disrespectful words from those who owe her most; she will have to keep up her own dignity, without giving way to pride. In short, she will have to be the busy brain, and active body, as well as the patient, loving heart of her home, without ever sinking into

the household drudge. And to accomplish this end, it is necessary that her body, mind, and spirit should all be exercised, so that her whole being may live in healthy harmony.

Now, in the fulfilment of household duties, both the body and mind are called upon to work, in having to look after and to plan for others. But this work appertains principally to material things, and, if viewed in the abstract, apart from duty, tends to materialise the character. And it must be done; it is not optional. A woman, entering into a home of her own, is as much pledged to look after it and its inmates, as a man who accepts a responsible appointment is pledged to fulfil the duties of that appointment. Thus, the exercise of her body and mind is a duty which is imposed upon her by others. But the exercise of the spiritual part of her mind, that most important portion of her threefold essence—her soul—is a duty which must be imposed upon her by herself.

In the busiest life there are spare moments, and it is those precious moments which tend either to elevate or deteriorate the character of the mistress of a house.

My young readers, now is the time for you to learn how to occupy those unemployed intervals of your future life. Now, that you are comparatively free from definite duties, and that you can, to a great extent, plan out your own hours, you can use your newly-gotten privilege by acquiring knowledge and interest in one special pursuit, which hereafter will soothe your temper and calm your mind, amidst the petty cares and worries which may be your lot. Try and satisfy yourself for which of the arts and sciences you have been taught, you have most taste, and then start upon its further cultivation with earnest systematic application, and make it part of your life. The motive for your education hitherto has been to train your mind, as young creepers are trained, so that they may be prepared and fit to receive the sun and dews from heaven, and to shoot out their own strength in different directions.

Now comes the test of what your education has done for you. Shoot out one of its branches by yourself, and just as surely as the seed sown on the good ground bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty, so you will surely rejoice in the fruits of your labour, and feel the truth of that line of Boileau's:

"C'est avoir profité, que de savoir s'y plaire." Only don't distrust yourself. Application, which is in the power of each one of us to improve or acquire, leads to far grander results than talent. The latter has never produced a great man or woman without the former, and the former has often created the latter to grand and useful ends. I believe that regular study by oneself makes more impression upon a mind in which the seeds of instruction have been judiciously sown, than study under the direction of another. Books, the result of the

greatest brains of all climes and all ages, can then be the instructors.

You should make the choice of the study with great care and forethought. It would be well to consult your former teachers before deciding upon it. Remember, your heart will have to be in your work, and you will cultivate that special study for the education of the spiritual part of your being. Yes; God has given us arts and sciences to lift up our souls, as well as our minds, to Him. His creation is beautiful, and He allows us to represent it in music, poetry, and painting, so that our minds should contemplate His mind; and, more than this, so that our souls should be lifted up in adoration of Himself, the Author of all Beauty.

His creation is wonderful! and He allows us to contemplate it in sciences, so that we should feel our own nothingness, and His power, and immensity, and infinity. And thus you will fit yourselves for the practical, active duties of life, by having an elevating occupation, in which you can always become happily absorbed. It will be to you a recreation amidst the frets and scorns of time; it will be a destroyer of that most sure destroyer of domestic happiness, *ennui*; and it will be a safeguard against seeking for pleasure in the hollowness of society.

Bulwer Lytton says, "To woman the un-happiest home should be happier than all the excitement abroad," and may heaven help us, if England's wives and mothers find their chief pleasure in the poisonous atmosphere, both to mind and body, of crowded rooms. If they are stupid and unattractive women, their aim in life becomes idle gossip and senseless talk; and if they are clever and attractive, their more dangerous aim becomes flirting and admiration.

My young readers, work now with your mind and heart in your leisure hours at some one pursuit, and nobler results than all the admiration of the world await you. You will be moulding and sanctifying your character in your girl home, and diffusing that happiness about you which is the sure privilege of well-spent hours to shed; and you will, at the same time, be fitting yourself for the future home, which it is your mission to guide and direct. And if you do not attain proficiency enough in your work to make it appreciated beyond your own circle, it matters not. All earnest work is holy, for it is God's command.

The old monks had a proverb, "Laborare est orare," and I love to think that in working we are lifting up our hearts in prayer, and that though we may not see the fruits of our exertions on earth, we shall see them in Heaven; and that by working earnestly here, in ever so feeble a way, we are fitting ourselves for higher work there.

"Went ye not forth in prayer?"

Then ye went not forth in vain,

For the Sower, the Son of Man, was there,  
And His was that precious grain."

