

One Reason of the Inefficiency of Women's Work.

By subordinating self-improvement to her various domestic and social duties a woman not infrequently defeats her own end: the sum-total of her usefulness in these very directions is less than it might be if she gave some time each day to intellectual culture. We are standing on the solid platform of practical usefulness and are not considering the delights of knowledge for its own sake; for all of charity is not bread and butter, and all of motherhood is not mending. Many a mother, by an excess of devotion to her little son, unfits herself to be a mother to the same boy when he goes to college; for he needs sympathy as much in his higher studies as he did in his blocks and his marbles. The wisest mother will not merely see that her child is fed, and clothed, and instructed, and made good and happy for the time being. She will be careful to keep as far as possible on a level with his intellectual stature, so that his mental attitude towards her may not change with his physical — so that the man may feel, as did the baby, that his mother is not only the best, but the wisest, of women.

Honest Dick Steele's reference to Lady Elizabeth Hastings, that "to love her was a liberal education," is oftener quoted than deserved; and yet this is the friendship which every woman of intelligence and will can give to her husband and to her children. Surely an intelligent woman needs only to appreciate the value of such an equipment in order to feel that time spent in gaining it is not wasted — that it affords a sufficient reason for taking one hour at least out of twenty-four from the other duties of life, however absorbing they may be.

The actual knowledge which comes of intellectual work is of great value, but this is not all. It is not the mere facts gained, but the mental discipline acquired, which give to the habit of study its highest justification, its chief value as a sort of mental gymnastics.

The idea is notorious among men that women cannot do business, cannot carry on a connected line of thought, cannot follow and appreciate an extended argument. Like most generalizations, this admits of large exceptions, but it is in the main true. We all know, for example, how impossible it is to converse with some women. They interrupt us in the middle of what we consider an interesting and valuable train of thought, and run off on a side-track, without the slightest appreciation of the discourtesy of which they are guilty or of the fact that our conversation was making logical approach towards some definite point. Their own remarks are never directed by any other than the "word suggestion" method: one thing "reminds" them of another indefinitely, and they become confused in a hopeless labyrinth of parentheses, without attempting to extricate themselves, and without even being conscious that they are lost. The same method is followed in their actions as in their thought processes.

We do not attempt to say how much of this is owing to a native lack of logical power; but we are convinced that it is largely due either to defective early training or else to long-continued intellectual stagnation after school-days are over — probably to both. A woman's occupation, it is true, consists largely in heterogeneous details; she is subject to constant interruptions; she

is at the beck and call of her husband and children and of the world in general; she is sometimes imposed upon and tyrannized over, often without realizing the extent of the humiliation; and she is seldom brave enough to be willing to seem disobliging. The result of all this is that, to a certain extent, she loses her individuality. In short, she becomes deficient in sense of proportion and in power of analysis.

When the situation is thus viewed it becomes a little difficult to say whether intellectual stagnation should be treated as cause or as effect. Certainly the character of one's occupation has a strong reflex influence upon the character of one's thoughts, and it cannot be denied that the same degree of system is impossible in a woman's work as in a man's. However, our object is not to cavil with fate, but to consider what are the best methods of procedure under existing circumstances; and from this point of view intellectual stagnation appears as the cause of much that is defective in the work of women.

The laws of habit and of exercise hold good of the mind as well as of the body. The hands perform most easily familiar actions; the mind, kept alert by constant exercise, is ready for any emergency. If we keep our minds wide awake by constantly studying and doing genuine *thinking* in some definite direction; if we learn to analyze the various elements of a subject and see their true relative importance; if we learn to weigh and balance arguments with nice discrimination; if we keep at our command, by constant practice, the power of concentrating our thoughts — these healthy mental habits will have a wholesome influence upon everything that we do. When a thousand different claims are made upon our time and attention the habit of analysis will stand us in good stead, and we shall have the strength of mind to do the most important things, and to leave the others undone, instead of helplessly attending to whatever important item happens to be brought to our notice first. When hard problems must be solved and difficult questions answered, the habit of reflection and quick decision will be found simply invaluable. When the distractions of the kitchen, the nursery, and the street make life one vast hubbub, the habit of concentrating thought and fixing attention will make it possible to form and keep in mind fixed purposes, and to make intelligent efforts towards carrying them out. In short, an active mind is as necessary an equipment for every-day life as a strong body, and a proper early education is not sufficient to keep either the mind or the body in healthy condition. They both need vigorous and habitual exercise if the power for work is to be kept at its maximum. Moreover, if the opportunity for healthy development does not lie in the course of a person's ordinary occupation, that is just the case in which it must be sought. A field-laborer needs no gymnasium, but a sedentary man does; a professional student will naturally have an active mind, but a wife and mother, whose affections are occupied more than her intellect, needs to set up a sort of home gymnasium for intellectual culture, and to practice in it faithfully.

It is not without a keen appreciation of the inherent difficulties of the case that these suggestions are made. Probably no class of people meet more obstacles in matching practice to theory than the women of whom we speak, but it is none the less necessary that their

theories should be sound. The inherent difficulties of the case make it only the more necessary to have a sure footing and a true aim.

Subjects and methods and times for study must always vary with individual cases; several good suggestions have been given in former numbers of *THE CENTURY*. Our design is simply to suggest the proper mental attitude in the matter. If a woman considers an hour of aggressive, absorbing intellectual work as much an essential of a symmetrical day as sleep, or food, or exercise,—if her ultimate object in the study is increased power for actual work,—she will be much more likely to study than if she regards intellectual occupation as either a useless effort or a selfish indulgence. Of course there are crises in life when study must be suspended, just as proper rest and exercise are dispensed with under special pressure, and there are probably some cases in which it is actually impossible; but this does not alter the fact that it is well to be in the habit of sleeping and of exercising, and, we would add, of studying.

Mary A. Johnson.

The Decline of the Editorial.

It has been urged with pertinacity that the editorial leader should be signed by the writer, and unresponsive pity has been called upon to rise in behalf of the man whose talents find no recognition in the anonymity of the daily press. For my part, I know of nothing more unfortunate than would be such a change in custom, and I sincerely hope the desire for change, for the unusual, will not lead to its adoption generally. The potency of the editorial "we" has suffered enough in the last dozen years without this final blow, and that it has retained its power at all has been due to the willingness of great minds to sacrifice the reputation for the advantages of the freedom of the anonymous form. The decadence of newspaper influence would follow the change almost inevitably, and the fault would be the writer's, not the reader's. An appeal to all who use their pens as bread-winners would, I think, bring a response that the sense of responsibility is not less when the writer is unidentified, while a broader view is commonly taken and more courage shown in the expression of opinions which may provoke dispute, yet may, none the less, be eternally true. The tendency of the individual is to avoid quarrel, and the avoidance of quarrels is the gravest of newspaper blunders. To arouse some antagonisms is almost as necessary as to make friendships, in a progressive journal.

Journalists should need no warning, however, against the use of the first person, singular, in view of the decline of the editorial which most of them are aware of, though not so many will admit it. If Mr. Matthew Arnold had not spoken, one might appeal to the average citizen for confirmation of the declaration that the editorial has, in fact, declined. By this let it not be supposed that the leader is not so able (to use a favorite newspaper word) as in the earlier days, for a comparison of the editorial page of to-day with the page of twenty years ago shows no falling off, but rather a gain in method and matter. It is simply that the editorial is not read with the attention once given it, that it is now merely one department of the newspaper, receiving the consideration of the subscriber if

his horse-car journey happens to be long enough. Of course a good deal of this neglect has been due to the increased size of the more prosperous papers and the vast extension of the field they cover. The news columns are so much more interesting than they used to be! But there have been other causes at work, and the great increase of personalism—the word is used in a broad sense—is to blame for the loss of respect for the purely editorial utterance. The "managing editor," the executive officer of the newspaper, is the really responsible party. How dare an editorial writer advance an original opinion on a subject of national importance when the chief executive on the other side of the partition has received "specials" from Washington and every State capital giving the views of men of all shades of opinion on the issue involved, many of them speaking with an authority which readers will accept as conclusive? Why venture to discuss the prospects of European war, when Bismarck's opinions, construed by Salisbury, may be had for money paid to maintain a social lion as correspondent in London? The editor of the metropolitan journal is driven to discuss phases instead of the subject-matter, or, perhaps, devotes himself to praise of the enterprise that has obtained the important expression found in our news columns of this date! The editorial writer has, alas! not even the title of "editor" in some cases, and the conductor of more than one powerful journal to-day never puts pen to paper.

That the editorial page may soon disappear altogether is a dreadful possibility; and if it is to be committed to the care of the elegant essayist, writing over his own signature, there will remain no reason for its existence in its present form. The pressure for space in every great daily is severe, and it now requires a stern front to hold the three or four columns sacred for editorial utterances. Give the news editor his opportunity and he will abolish the essayist without a qualm of conscience.

Yet one cannot see the approaching doom of a department in journalism so powerful as this without an effort to avert it. A force so potential as the daily newspaper should be something more than the mirror of events which the executive forces of journalism are making it. Let them pursue their glorious career undisturbed and hire the Prince of Wales for special society correspondence, or the Pope for theological discussion, if they can; but let the editorial "we" remain. The leader writer must, however, give in this daily work a cause for his existence, and that can be found only by some change in method.

Far be it from me to suggest aught to the learned and "able" writers of the editorial page in the great cities, yet there have been occasions when an editorial expression of opinion might have been of tremendous value, backed by that mysterious anonymity of which I have spoken. Some readers, I know, looked in vain for such an editorial discussion of the longshoremen's strike not long ago that would have shown real knowledge of the matter and an opinion based upon that knowledge. The instance is, perhaps, hardly a fair one, but there should be, it seems to me, a more thorough study of current public agitations by editorial writers who now avoid them, or, worse yet, slur them over with vague generalities. No so-called "expert" opinion could take the place of the editorial discussion so