

COMMUNICATIONS.

A Woman's Thoughts upon the Education of Women.

EDITOR OF SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: As representatives of this wonderful century we are perpetually congratulating ourselves—in Pharisee fashion—upon our superiority. We find ourselves looking back upon the past of our grandmothers with a compassion not untouched by scorn. It is not so much that we are holier than they; for holiness is, perhaps, just a trifle old-fashioned; but that we are so much wiser!

Our civilization has, indeed, carried us forward with gigantic strides in material things; we have thousands of comforts, and luxuries, and even advantages undreamed of by our grandmothers; but the stern question which circumstances, now and again, put to us is not merely: What do we possess? But rather: What are all these vast advantages making of us—individually and collectively? In the rush and struggle to *have*, are we not often losing sight of the old-fashioned virtue which resides in *being*?

The most favorable conditions are not always, nor even generally, the softest. That physical regimen which develops the largest normal amount of *thw* and *sinew*; which produces the soundest physique and the steadiest nerves, is the best. In just the same way it is neither the large amount, nor the delicate quality of our mental nutriment which is going to make of us a race of intellectual giants.

The education of boys and young men is undoubtedly less one-sided and narrowing now, than it was a hundred years ago. The introduction, into school and college courses, of the physical and natural sciences, has, to a certain extent, displaced the classics. However essential a classical education may be, both because of the information and the discipline which it affords, the almost exclusive pursuit of such studies is undoubtedly stultifying. There has been a great multiplication of studies even in boys' schools, it is true; but there is about a properly constituted boy a healthy animalism which enables him to resist the forcing process so unmercifully used by the educators of the present day.

With girls, the case is very different. The system bears more heavily, and the power of resistance is less. A girl, with a slighter muscular development, a more delicate nervous organization, is expected in four years to cover very nearly the same ground which is gone over by a boy in eight. The textbooks, it is true, are not so difficult, and the course is less advanced; but when girls' "accomplishments" are counted in, the *number of subjects* is about the same.

The consequence of all this is that a girl's study is far more superficial. Few teachers of experience will deny that while a bright girl will work harder

and recite better than a boy of the same intelligence, the boy is far less easily satisfied with a mechanical way of learning.

A lady who had had much experience in teaching both boys and girls, speaking of the extraordinary obtuseness of a certain pupil, said:

"In a physiology class, this young lady of fifteen inquired with languid surprise, 'Is there not a straight passage through the head from one ear to the other?'—a somewhat natural conclusion," the teacher commented dryly, "if she had ever watched the processes of her own mind."

"Which would you prefer teaching," asked a visitor,—"*boys or girls?*"

"Boys, infinitely," was the prompt reply. "No boy, for instance, would ever have asked such a question as *that*. He would long before have investigated the subject with a lead-pencil. Not, probably, in his own ears," she added meditatively, "but in his younger brother's."

The education of a girl is supposed to be finished when she is about eighteen. This makes it necessary that the heaviest pressure shall be brought to bear upon her just when she is growing most rapidly, and when her physical system requires the most favorable conditions. The dangers of this high-pressure method do not lie so much in overstimulation of the brain, as in physical and nervous depression, with an abnormal distension of the memory, at the expense of the thinking powers.

If the public mind could once be dispossessed of the stupid notion that education is a mere filling of the mind with facts and theories, and return to the noble old Greek idea of the gymnasium, there would be some hope of a radical reform. With boys this old notion is necessarily retained in a modified form: a boy is making ready for the battle of life. Whatever he learns either directly bears upon his chosen calling, or else indirectly by developing him and making a man of him so that he may be strong at all points. But school, as affording a course of "training" for a girl, is an idea almost ludicrous. Girls go to school, not to be developed into reasonable thinking beings, but to have a certain amount of information imparted to them, or, rather, "crammed" into them.

The most vigorous mind can assimilate only a limited amount of mental nutriment in a given time. When too large a quantity is forced into the mind, the effect is analogous to that of overeating. The powers are overtaxed, and even the normal amount of nourishment is not healthfully and comfortably appropriated.

As a matter of fact, do not our girls "go through" all the sciences, and some of the arts; in their last three or four years at school do not they study literature, rhetoric, logic, and political economy; natural, mental, and moral philosophy; physiology, chemistry, botany, geology, and astronomy; geometry, algebra, and perhaps the trigonometries; and

with this one or two languages, and at least one accomplishment? And yet, three years after she has left school, who ever expects from an ordinary young woman a sane opinion upon any subject connected with any of these topics? The enormous mass has either never been taken in at all, or else it has been somehow gotten rid of, and the mind is in a state of collapse. Some women do survive the course, and come out with their thinking powers not quite destroyed; but that is due to an exceptional vigor of mental constitution, and in spite of their teaching, rather than because of it.

The fact that the majority of women teachers teach simply because they must do something, and can do nothing else so "lady-like," is left out of the account. The system, even with good honest teaching, is a process of stultification. It ignores every law of growth and development; it is founded on a false notion of the nature and end of education; and thus is working toward a mistaken end by unwisely chosen means. These strictures apply to the ordinary private school system. Public schools, looking toward some practical application of what is taught, attempt less, and do what they attempt more thoroughly.

The dissatisfaction with this superficial cramming, which has been growing stronger for several years past, is now beginning to take a practical and positive form. Many a woman who looks with utter disgust upon the clamorous crowd, demanding the right of suffrage, cherishes quietly in her heart a firm conviction that she does possess an inalienable and God-given right to grow into the fullest stature of her intellectual womanhood. While the clamors are clamoring on, she has fulfilled the simple condition of deserving the guerdon, and so has won it: Harvard has opened her gates and admitted women to her instruction, if not to her honors.

The movement was a quiet one, and originated outside the circle of college instructors.

When the Cambridge professors were approached in reference to the subject, the response was so cordial that many of them offered instruction without charges rather than permit the experiment to fail. The tuition being private, this generous offer was, of course, declined. Nothing has been asked of the university as a corporation, but by the cordial kindness of the professors, some forty of the university courses will be open to girls at the beginning of the next collegiate year. Women who desire to devote several additional years to study, and who pass examinations equivalent to those of the male student, may now take either the four years college course, or special "University" courses, as they may elect. The conditions of admission are very nearly the same, the standard of scholarship being equal, and the expense rather less to a girl. This is not a new experiment, and has none of the objections belonging to a mixed education. Conservative England has taken the lead in this matter, in Girton College, Cambridge; but Harvard possesses some advantages over her older English sister; the expenses of the women's course here are less, and the instruction is more generally given by the full professors.

It is however probable that for many years to come superficial self-sufficiency will be the rule, and good, sound, modest common sense and education the exception. Editors perhaps enjoy peculiar advantages for observation in this field, since every woman in the United States, it would seem, before she settles down to anything else, tries once to write for a magazine. That ignorance which is respectable, or even lovable when veiled by sweet womanly graces and the gentle offices of home, becomes hideous when it casts off its womanhood and undertakes to be didactic, or witty, or pathetic, in silly platitudes, bad grammar and worse spelling.

Mrs. Browning, in "Aurora Leigh," gives the following greeting to a new authoress, by the opposite sex. She makes them say:

"Oh excellent!
What grace! What facile turns! What fluent sweeps!
What delicate discernment, almost thought.
The book does honor to the sex, we hold.
Among our female authors we make room
For this fair writer, and congratulate
The country that produces in these times
Such women competent to—spell!"

The point of this sarcasm would, however, be lost on many of the would-be women writers of the present day; even this "competence," which their grandmothers possessed, being lacking.

S. B. H.

"The New Museum in Rome."

A CORRECTION.

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DEAR SIR: I notice that an error has crept into the title of one of the illustrations of the interesting and valuable article in the May SCRIBNER on "The New Museum in Rome." As this is the first attempt, so far as I am aware, to popularize knowledge of the important art discoveries that have recently been made at Rome, any misinterpretation of their meaning seems worth correcting. The charming little statue of "Love Disguised with the Attributes of Hercules" is misrepresented under the appellation of "Commodus as the Infant Hercules." This doubtless has arisen from the fact that there are in the New Museum two busts of Commodus, discovered on the same spot and on successive days, and both remarkable for their wonderful execution. One of them represents him with the attributes of Hercules, and of this an engraving is given; while the other is that of a youth of some eighteen years of age; both of them are referred to in the article. But the title of "The Infant Hercules," given to the statuette in question by the official catalogue of the museum, is also incorrect; though it is described under this designation in an article by Cav. C. L. Visconti in the first number of the "Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Municipale di Roma." That name ought to be confined to actual representations of the hero in his infancy, like the singular and extravagant example in touchstone in the Capitoline Museum at Rome; or those in which the baby is represented in the act of strangling the serpents sent to destroy him. The graceful statuette in question is simply the most charming specimen that has come down to us of the numerous parodies of celebrated originals, in which the "laek plastic" art of the ancients delighted, and about which the Greek Anthology furnishes us much information. The famous "Hercules in Repose" of Lysippus is well known to us from the copy of it by Glykon, of Athens, now in the Naples Museum, where it goes by the name of the "Farnese Hercules." If we place photographs of the two statues side by side, the intention of the parody is very evident. There are slight differences in the treatment of the original; the head is bare, and the apples of the Hesperides are held in the right hand, which rests upon the hip. Statuettes in the Louvre, however, resembling the present one, hold the apples in the right hand, instead of the left; and one of them has the head bare, while others have it muffled in the lion-skin, and smiling in the same arch fashion as this one. This is also the method of treatment of the one in the Vienna Museum, which of all that I have seen most nearly approaches this in gracefulness and *naïveté*. Welcker has suggested that this latter may possibly represent the infant Hermes, who has