

## WHAT IS THE BEST EDUCATION FOR GIRLS?



N entering upon the consideration of our subject, it is necessary that we should consider woman, not as the mere duplicate of man, but rather as his heaven-sent counterpart, complement, and help-meet.

Now, taking this view of a woman's end and aims in life—subject to the higher consideration of her duty to and trust in God—the question arises, how best to conduct a girl's education so as to fit her for a special vocation.

For, if we only consider how indispensably needful for the welfare of both sexes is a woman's correct knowledge of and fitness for her appointed work,

and how much time, patience and ability are required before this knowledge and fitness can be acquired, we shall easily perceive that true feminine culture, though differing in many respects from that attained by man, is yet relatively equal to his in point of interest and importance.

Keeping well in view then, as a primary condition, that there shall be a fair division of work between the sexes, and that neither of them shall attempt a *monopoly* of it, we begin by advising that girls shall be trained specially in those branches of knowledge in which, in accordance with instinct and custom, men are not usually instructed. And even an imperfect list of these attainments will probably be found long enough and difficult enough to occupy the whole training-time of girls whose circumstances render it desirable that they should be self-dependent, and for whom these suggestions are more particularly intended.

In support of this advice, we have merely to glance at the course of study prescribed for or expected from our educated women, to see that it is exceedingly comprehensive. For it includes a knowledge of literature, languages, art, and science, as well as of all the graces and courtesies of modern life. Now, while such a course of education is for girls possessed of independent means most properly both liberal and exhaustive, yet it is surely a waste of time in the case of great numbers of girls who, at the best, acquire a useless and impracticable smattering of the various accomplishments—at the direct cost, too, of more solid kinds of knowledge—of knowledge, moreover, which would have more easily availed them in being self-supporting and helpful to all around them.

But here, doubtless, we are at issue with many of the present promoters of "woman's progress:" for we do not believe in a high or uniform standard of education as the *one* thing needful for advancing this, but would rather advocate a shorter and more practical system. For example, we should bestow upon most

girls of only average ability just such an amount of learning as is given to boys who are intended for occupations in which specific skill is more requisite than much book-learning or many accomplishments. But a disinclination to believe this, and a desire to obtain a so-called "higher," but uniform, education, appears to be one of the greatest errors of the time, and one of the many causes of woman's failure in doing woman's work. It is wonderful indeed how little educationists seem to perceive this, and how much, therefore, they encourage a want of interest in and capability for distinctively feminine occupations. If, in addition to the ordinary education just suggested, much more attention was given to domestic matters, and if there was superadded, according to bias or ability, only some one or two specific qualifications—artistic, ornamental, or mechanical—then most girls might be at once independent and fitted comfortably, if not contentedly, to continue so—since, owing to the great inequality of numbers between the sexes in these countries, many women must remain single and self-supporting all their lives.

This, perhaps, is the best place to express regret that an excessive desire for gay and expensive—rather than for suitable and simple—attire, often impels girls of the middle ranks to quit their homes much sooner than is really needful. There is generally bread enough—if not to spare—in most of these households, and by the daily practice of good management it would become no less. In good management, economy is an all-important element, and in no respect is economy more desirable than in this matter of dress. Over-dressing is one great evil of the age, and nowhere are its effects more painfully seen than amongst many girls of the lower class, who too often make themselves ridiculous by the tawdry and unbecoming attire which they assume in vulgar imitation of the class above them.

Further, the feelings of natural affection and self-denial would be strengthened by the continued performance of those little domestic duties which make up so much of home comfort, and which habitual practice makes so easy. Then, the various household implements and machines which men have gradually invented to lighten labour having now become the real hewers of wood and drawers of water for the women of this century, there is scarcely any severe or tedious drudgery to perform; and so, without becoming burdensome to their relatives, many well-educated girls might remain, making their homes models of comfort and contentment. These homes would be very different from what they often do become, when left to the wretched attempts of some poor, ill-paid, and badly-taught little maid-of-all-work. In many cases too such patient contentment with circumstances would be the best preparative in regard to that "honourable estate of matrimony," to which few girls are honestly indifferent. For men have

several good reasons for preferring—as they generally do—home-reared wives to those who, from living in large and lavishly appointed households, may have acquired habits of thriftlessness and prodigality to which people who have neither anxiety nor responsibility about the outlay of money so easily accustom themselves. Men as well as women, when they marry, desire to draw prizes; but surely fewer of them would be found avowed fortune-hunters, if they could only discern among girls of their own standing such a faculty for management, and such an attention to details, as would compensate for want of money.

But, to return to the case of those girls who require to be at once self-reliant and profitable members of the community, it is essential that before they have actually entered on a career, their friends should endeavour to study their respective tastes and to direct their inclinations into different channels. For, girls being naturally imitative, and easily influenced by fashion, there is always a danger of too many setting off in the same direction and over-crowding one or two fields of industry to the neglect of others which would afford at least equal scope for their exertions. And, in truth, this is just the very mischievous mistake which has been and still is being made by many clever, educated, and well-meaning women, that they hardly ever try to find any other outlet for the various and unequal capabilities of girls than that of training them to be teachers or governesses. Now, it is doubtless a most important matter to have a large class of girls competent to undertake the work of tuition, and it is one for which many are naturally well suited; but it is perfect madness for all to attempt to thrive by it.

We should at once perceive the absurdity of letting all boys enter upon one and the same business or profession; and yet this is exactly what many women seem inclined to do! Supposing that girls are educated very much alike up to a certain point, there is no good reason why they should all stop there, as if there were no other career open to them in all “woman’s kingdom” than to sit down and teach others what they have just barely learned themselves. A notion like this is as pernicious as it is absurd. The most careless observer, indeed, now sees that in this market the supply exceeds the demand; but is it not also obvious that there is a dearth of trained workers in some other not unimportant nor unremunerative departments of woman’s work? Granted even that all girls have had, so far, similar educational advantages, it does not follow that all are equally well qualified to teach; for, though the minds of all may be stored alike, many utterly fail in the power to impart it. So, we repeat, just at this point girls should be encouraged to diverge into various grooves of occupation, both in order to benefit themselves and not to damage each other’s chances. But why should skilful handicraft be nowadays deemed derogatory? Formerly to work diligently with the hands was the very mark and distinction of a virtuous woman; and is not the hand still the instrument of the brain? It would surely be neither tedious

nor difficult—since women are proverbially neat-handed—for many of them to acquire not merely skill but pre-eminent dexterity in suitable arts and handicrafts; such as copying of various kinds, etching, engraving, painting, sculpture—in these two last many women have excelled, for they are close observers of details—wood-carving, photography, watch-making, upholstery, &c. There are thus many employments, which may be pursued at home, highly suitable for women, provided that their careful execution and punctuality justifies employers in entrusting commissions to them.

And—to come down to the more useful and indispensable of feminine fine arts—there are millinery and dress-making, both interesting as occupations, and also of immense use in every home, rendering the possessors of these advantages independent, at all events as regards the making of their own clothes. Millinery may be called an art, since it requires continual inventive as well as exact imitative powers, and the light yet firm touch of an artist; while dress-making, with its niceties of fitting, its measurements, and its need of an intelligent adaptation of styles, may be termed a science. But, unless there is the fullest attention given by women to these particulars, men may, if they choose to accept an interchange of occupations, easily excel in them; indeed the prettiest bonnet of the season is generally the production of some Parisian man-milliner—the best hands in a first-class house of business often finding it altogether “inimitable.” And every one will tell you that, where precision of cut and fit are essential, as in a riding-habit, such exactitude is best secured at a tailor’s. But in all such vocations women should not let themselves be excelled; and there are many other ways by which neat-handed, industrious girls may practise self-help and contribute to the general prosperity.

One of these ways, which should be specially pointed out for some really superior girls to make choice of, is the condition of *domestic service*. Yes! in spite of the outcry which aversion to this mode of bread-winning raises, we think, and have always thought, that some girls of the more educated classes should be induced to enter upon the non-menial branches of it.

It is not in the least intended to make it a crowded outlet, and it is quite unlikely that it ever can be, since gently-trained girls dislike the very name and restraints of service, and naturally shrink from the prospect of association with persons inferior, in many respects, to themselves. But these trials, although great, would most effectually test the value of their own moral training and endurance, since a voluntary submission to them would be the most decided step they could take for the improvement of their less fortunate sisters. And the leaven of social culture contained in them would soon leaven the whole mass around; while they, on their own part, would take little hurt in comparison with the good they would effect in many a family circle. Such brave girls would be the true pioneers of progress, because, careless of caste, they would weld together to influence and raise

the various gradations of a household, until all should co-operate in an intelligent spirit for the common good.

The objection urged against the introduction of high-class servants, or lady helps, that they will injure the poorer classes by increasing competition, and so make it more and more difficult for the latter to get those situations which they have hitherto obtained so easily but filled so inefficiently, is only a temporary one, and one which, besides indicating its own remedy, would do further good by introducing, to some extent, compulsory education. For so soon as poor or careless or selfish parents perceive that their daughters, if found incompetent for the work they undertake, will no longer be employed, because more excellent substitutes can be found, then they will eagerly avail themselves of every local training agency—such as the free Female Industrial Schools, &c.—in which, in addition to the normal branches of English education, domestic duties or housewifery shall be systematically taught.

If then girls will only set about this mission in a right spirit, they may be sure of both welcome and reward. Ladies who are the heads of households would quickly discern in them their most valuable auxiliaries, and the increase of order, for which they would feel themselves indebted to their superior intelligence, would soon find its expression in a more gracious form of converse than has been possible

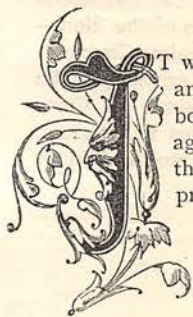
between mistresses and their servants. For all, profiting by the new arrangements, will find more time and inclination for friendly intercourse; and a lady may again, as in the olden times, find safe and pleasant pastime while sitting among her maidens—she in this way acquiring a deeper interest in them as members of her family, and they (unrepressed and unproved) admiring and imitating in her matters of greater moment to themselves than some fashion of dress or some prettiness of speech or demeanour.

It will be seen from the scope of the foregoing remarks, that their writer disapproves of educating women with any other view than that of fitting them for their own undoubted sphere—home—where woman's work remains, and will remain, as important in itself and as imperative in its requirements as ever.

Women will thus continue to recognise in men their natural guardians and protectors, and will yield to them the more public, the more exhausting, the more dangerous, and also the more lucrative employments; and they will carefully cherish those privileges and immunities which are their veritable "rights," by continuing to excel in those special branches of knowledge which tend to increase domestic happiness, seeing that, while they will find it difficult to attend to two different things at once and impossible to be in two places at the same time, yet they, as the very centre of the home-circle, will there assuredly find themselves to be the right persons in the right place. J. M<sup>C</sup>D.

## ON KEEPING A COMMONPLACE BOOK,

### AND HOW TO TURN IT TO PRACTICAL ACCOUNT.



IT would be idle at the present day to say anything in favour of books. Ever since books were, the greatest authors of all ages have given eloquent testimony to their inestimable value; they have been praised in prose and celebrated in song, have been collected and arrayed in splendid bindings, and sometimes confined up by bibliomaniacs as too precious to be put into the hands of mere readers; and they have, alas! been ruthlessly burnt and otherwise destroyed by barbarous conquerors. "Wondrous indeed is the virtue of a true book," says Carlyle; and he only echoes what many a thankful reader and scholar has said before him. Friends may change, and the dreams of youth fade away, but a man who seeks consolation in books will secure companions whose friendship will never fail him, and in whom he himself will find more and more to admire every day. Well might Southey write in the familiar lines—

"My days among the dead are passed;  
Around me I behold,  
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
The mighty minds of old:  
My never-failing friends are they,  
With whom I converse night and day."

It is not, however, with books in general that we have to deal now, but rather with one particular kind of book, which should contain within itself the essence of a good many others—that is to say, a *Commonplace Book*. The dictionary definition of it is a good one:—"A book in which things to be remembered are recorded and arranged under general heads." How many of the readers of this article keep such a book? Those who do will know its value without any explanation, and those who do not may, it is to be hoped, be tempted to commence such a volume at once. Let us see, then, what a *Commonplace Book* is. Every one who reads must from time to time be struck with certain special passages—a particular piece of prose, or more than ordinarily beautiful thought in verse, a reference or quotation, it may be—at all events, it is a something which causes the reader to pause for a moment and vaguely wish that the particular passage or thought should not be forgotten. But memory is treacherous, and as other ideas follow which we might also like to treasure, the author's words and thoughts very soon slip away from us. Or take another case. We are reading a newspaper, and come upon an article on some special subject of which we have long wished for fresh information. In one part there is a passage which contains an account of an invention