

life-like portraits of the animals, and their majestic indifference to the presence of the ducklings. One can almost see the look of remonstrance in their eyes as they survey the allowance of fodder, and remember the hours of hard work which preceded it. It is a speaking picture, every line instinct with life.

"The Post-Boy."

THIS picture, the original of which was painted by T. Goodall, a Royal Academician, obtains its distinctive character from the introduction of a single figure, the "post-boy." This personage left out, and we should have the yard of an English farm-house, of by no means the best class—a simple bit of English rural life, well enough in its way, but having no claims above others by the side of it. But the post-boy is an historical figure, who has played an important part in English national history, and the otherwise commonplace lad acquires quite a new interest with his top-boots, his horn, and the bag slung over his shoulder. Evidently he is curious to know what the letter contains which he has brought; evidently, too, the pretty country girl intends to keep it all to herself, and will have to exercise her wit and ingenuity to parry the suspicious old lady's questions when the post-boy has taken himself away—which he is in no hurry to do. Turner, the great artist, used to say that critics and writers saw a thousand things in his pictures that he himself never dreamed of. But what we have indicated as characteristic of the "Post-Boy" is self-evident enough, and furnishes a glimpse of the picturesque if homely English life of the preceding generation.

The Interests of Middle-aged Women.

THIS question has assumed a new aspect of late years, since women have taken a larger share in the activities formerly largely controlled by men; and there are women and journals that urge, as a compensation for the loss of youth and the attention and admiration it wins, the desirability of middle-aged women striving, when their time is no longer occupied with the care of young children, to achieve a place in the fields of active business and professional life. To our view this sort of talk is apt to be very misleading. It shows a want of knowledge of what is necessary to success in business and professional life, and it fails to take into account the numerous family and social interests in which a woman is involved who has done her whole duty, and kept the links of the chain bright that bind her to her family and the rest of the world. People who have bestowed any thought upon the subject know that the habits and modes of thought and work established between youth and middle age, that is between twenty-five and fifty, cling to us through life, and what we have not laid the foundation for, at least before forty-five or fifty has passed over our heads, we shall not be likely to reach afterwards. There may be cases where a strong predisposition had existed toward a special career which had been interfered with by the exercise of domestic functions, and which has been taken up when time and opportunity permitted; but these must be very rare. The large majority of women reach middle age with habits fixed, with faculties sharpened and improved in some respects by experience; but accustomed to work in given directions, and less capable of the sudden spurts of activity which characterize youth and untried strength.

The middle-aged woman who has properly cultivated herself and her surroundings loses nothing

in not receiving the sort of consideration she received as a girl. Then she was the recipient of all sorts of blessing and kindness, now she is the one to bestow them upon others. If her husband has done his duty abroad as she has at home, their house is a center from which a constant stream of beneficence flows, not only toward those who are directly dependent upon them, but outwardly, in a widening circle of which the middle-aged woman, wife, mother, friend, possibly child herself still, of some older woman, is the force and inspiration.

We reap that which we sow. The narrow, self-centered man or woman, realizes this as they grow towards middle-age and find their children looking forward with hope and anticipation to leaving the parental roof, and nothing in the way of friends or neighborhood interest to take their place—but the woman cannot throw herself out of these cramping circumstances into an arena occupied by trained, as well as young and strong competitors.

The fields of active effort present a very different aspect to women of to-day from that which was exhibited twenty years ago. Then the places and spaces were unoccupied except by underbrush and weeds, which had to be cleared away by pioneers whose work was more preparatory than thorough or complete. To-day the preliminary work has to be done no more; the means exist which did not exist then for furnishing the education and training of the faculties required to compete with men in the trades, in business, or in the professions; and numbers of young, able women are availing themselves of these opportunities, and gradually raising the standard of women's work in these directions. That women could work at all in these untried fields, the first who essayed them had to prove; having proved this, and the means being supplied for their intellectual equipment, as good work, and work in the same way, will be demanded from them as from men.

There is this difference, moreover, between men and women: whereas men at middle-age are in the prime and plenitude of their powers, women who are in active life begin to feel the necessity for reducing the amount of their daily expenditure of force, and resting somewhat upon what they have gained. Usually this is possible with the successful wife and mother. Through the man's exertions and her economy, their social position has improved; there is no longer the necessity for her personal service in such ways as she formerly gave it. She has time to work for and with her growing daughters, to cultivate youthful society for their sakes, to establish her friendly relations, and attend to such neighborhood and church and community interests as naturally fall to her share. This is the life of the married middle-aged woman, and the one in which she finds truest happiness. Who can tell what that woman sacrifices who has to give up her consecration to her own family, her intimacy with her own children, the sweet knowledge and loving remembrance which comes from daily and hourly association?

Is not the after life of that daughter likely to be happiest, who spent her months of preparation for her own bridal in the society and companionship of her mother, and whose thoughts of her are interwoven with every kind and thoughtful act for the family comfort and welfare? We would not say one word which would put an obstacle in the path of any woman; but all do not need to become doctors, or lawyers, or writers, or lecturers, in order to fill an important place in the world; nor is it helpful to women to add any more to the army of incompetents that already exist, or dignify the promptings of their vanity and ambition with high-sounding phrases. Let us be honest or nothing.

Ruin to the Children.

THERE is a great deal of effort made nowadays on behalf of the children; everything is provided for them in the way of books, dress, entertainment, and the like; and there is an energetic society which does a great deal of active, and excellent work in the prevention of cruelty among the poorer classes.

But why cannot something be done to save children from the idiotic vanity of some ignorant, and foolish mothers? Why cannot something be done to put a stop to the public entertainments for which children, boys and girls of tender age, are remorselessly chartered, exposed to imminent risks,—their budding minds engrossed, excited, stimulated by something entirely foreign to the simple routine of daily life and school study, and prematurely aroused to a knowledge of the envy and bitterness of world-wearied women?

Late children's parties are, fortunately, now almost wholly unknown; a very salutary change has taken place in that respect, even in the social life of adults. Afternoon receptions have largely taken the place of the old crowded evening "parties," and there are few children's gatherings, no matter how "fashionable" they may be, that are not held between such hours as make it possible for the little ones of a family to attend them, and yet be at home and in bed at nearly their usual time. The children's "carnivals," and other public entertainments of a similar character, gotten up within the past few years, ostensibly for charitable purposes, exercise an influence so detrimental, so directly contrary to every effort that has been made in behalf of health, simplicity, regularity, thorough training, and a modest reserve in deportment, that it seems extraordinary some strong protest has not been made before this time in regard to an evil which, under the guise of charity, has assumed dangerous proportions.

The time consumed in the preparation for one of these public displays is at least two months, sometimes nearer three. During this time the children go to the hall of a dancing master three afternoons in a week for "rehearsals." This in all sorts of weather, in the midst of the strictest and most essential part of the school year. These rehearsals increase in number, frequency, and importance as the evening of the entertainment approaches, and must be attended to, at the sacrifice of time, strength and study. Finally, the children are forced to appear in expensive costumes provided by themselves—some of which are very light, others heavy—and take their part in the show, which lasts till twelve o'clock at night, though they may not appear for more than three minutes; and all this labor, and trouble, and time—this waste of force for an entire season of school life—is permitted in order that the child may dance, or attitudinize in public before a crowd, for from three to fifteen minutes! Should the child follow this up by imbibing a passion for the stage and the life of a dancer—should she elect to come before the foot-lights a few years later for money—the uplifting of hands and the groans would be beyond calculation.

Yet, in nine cases out of ten, this first experience implants a taste for public applause and cheap notoriety, which exerts a deteriorating influence, and not unfrequently a disastrous one. We must preserve the simplicity of childhood if we would have our children enjoy at the proper time, and to the full, the pleasures of the coming years. But it is cruelty to them to deprive them of their best opportunity for the sake of forestalling a period of doubtful pleasure. If charities can be sustained in no other way, they should not be sustained at all.