

Talks with Girls.

BY JENNIE JUNE.

SPECIAL TRAINING.



ONE often hears the remark made in regard to college graduates and girls who are receiving a superior general education, "What is the use of it? to what use can they put it?" Now, the idea that a girl is not to be well educated unless she can in some way turn it into a means of livelihood is an absurd one to begin with. It is a matter for regret that so many of our best and brightest girls are forced into the arena, and made to struggle for subsistence just as they are entering young womanhood, and are ready to participate in social and domestic life; but it would be still greater cause for regret if old ideas so far prevailed that a thorough education could be considered thrown away or not put to its best use because the girl who is its object is not to be engaged in some special calling.

In reality a general education, no matter how good it may be, does not fit either a man or woman for earning a livelihood. Thousands of men who are college graduates have found this out to their cost. When the gold-fields of California were first opened, they swarmed with well-educated but impecunious men, who, without any special training or preparation in any direction, found themselves at an immeasurable disadvantage beside the skillful carpenter or even the expert tailor and shoemaker. A good general education makes men and women intelligent and appreciative, pleasant as friends, and delightful as companions; it also aids the individual in getting better results out of a special training; but it is not sufficient of itself to achieve the *special* object. It is true that a regular college course at a normal school does fit girls for teachers, but this *is* special. The training is thorough in that direction. This practical drill and preparation is left out of the ordinary boarding-school and college altogether, and the teaching also is less rigid, the curriculum more flexible than in schools organized as our normal schools are for a definite purpose. Not that the best features of a good general education are neglected; on the contrary, so far as the Normal College of the City of New York is concerned, it is conducted on very broad as well as very sound principles, and assists its students to a high degree of general development, as well as a thorough technical grounding.

All girls, however, do not go to normal schools, all do not wish to become teachers, all could not, if they did; and the point I wish to impress is this: that desirable and necessary as a fine general education is, it must be supplemented by some special aptitude, or acquired drill in a given direction, if a life-work is to be followed, or a livelihood obtained. The

necessity for this exists just as much with boys as girls; more in fact, for the quickness of girls often enables them to "pick up," and carry on some pursuit, more or less successfully, which a boy would fail to perceive, as offering any basis for independent exertion, and it is this picking-up process which is responsible for the reputation which women acquire for doing inferior work, and which really stands in the way of their permanent advancement. From various sources we hear a great deal of the disadvantages and disabilities which girls have to contend with, in the endeavor to earn a livelihood, but I really do not think they are any greater than those of boys. It is true there are certain resources for boys, which to those who can avail themselves of them secure honorable future positions; but then the number influenced in this way is comparatively very small, while the great masses struggle and fight for the smallest chances, in a way that seems exceptionally hard to a girl, if she has to encounter the same experience.

Well-educated boys, sons of very respectable parents, work sometimes for years in an office or store for from three to five dollars per week, in fact until they have obtained young manhood, and only work up step by step, through diligent and untiring effort. Educated girls want to begin on a salary sufficient to support them, and enable them to dress handsomely, and they consider it a terrible hardship that they should be obliged to submit to hours and regulations, even to achieve their loudly demanded independence.

This actual knowledge of work as it is, this acquisition of practical experience of its details, of the conditions of its thorough and faithful performance, is the most valuable part of the severe discipline, which getting what some ask for, has imposed upon many women who have not asked at all. The money part is perhaps that for which they have the immediate necessity, the personal freedom is the result which grows out of it upon which they congratulate themselves; but the acquaintance with real work and workers, and their influence upon life and character, is that which brings the actual blessing.

What the specialty is which girls acquire, or to which they devote their attention is not of so much importance as they think. The natural aptitude is the important thing to begin with, and if this is conscientiously cultivated it will afford a resource, if one should be needed, no matter what it is. It may be penmanship, it may be decorative painting, it may be embroidery, it may be languages, it may be physiology, it may be cutting out clothing, or cooking. Whatever it is, carry it out to its legitimate conclusion, make a pursuit of it, or at least make yourself an expert in it. It will do no harm any way.

There is an old English saying, that a small bird can fly through a large hole just as well as a small one, in fact, better; and it is sometimes rendered thus—that "you cannot make a hole too large for the smallest bird to fly through;" and this seems to me to be very applicable to those who are afraid that girls will have so much education they will not

know what to do with it; or that it will be thrown away, if they do not put it to the prescribed use of making themselves pecuniarily independent.

I am sorry myself that there is any necessity for a woman to place herself in this position. I wish all men stood in their proper place as willing and honest providers, and all women were the care-takers, the home-makers, the educators of children, and the social guardians and law-givers. I wish the daughters were trained to assist in the work of the household, and the care and training of the younger children, and this without any detriment to the highest, most complete development, and to that perfect unity of interests, which would render them more or less capable of filling any vacant place; and realize as an obligation, the duty of putting themselves where they could do the most good.

But this is not the condition in which society at present finds itself. Instead of being associative, it is antagonistic. We are endeavoring to solve new modern problems with old weapons, and with the old acrimonious fighting spirit strong within us. We have inherited from a warlike past the feeling that the hand of every living man or woman is against every other man and woman, and we bring this temper, this disposition, into peaceful life, into industrial pursuits, which demand above and beyond all other things unity, trust, confidence, and co-operation.

The aggregated populations, the opening up of boundless sources of wealth, the success of great enterprises, places enormous resources in the hands of some persons, and naturally these are men, for it is men who have in the past controlled the outside activities, and created a machinery by which the results flow into their hands; this is all right, if they are willing to share them with women who make and keep their homes, who bear and rear the children, who maintain the social order, and perform such other duties as should be delegated to them.

But alas! men have not got rid of the spirit of appropriation, the old masterful spirit is strong upon and within them; and though serfdom and slavery are abolished by law, yet there are persons who still represent the old order, and not having other dependants, exercise the overbearing and tyrannical will of the despot upon wife and children.

There are others with whom it is a mere matter of selfish appropriation. They are in a position to take all, and they want to keep it; they do not want to divide, not even with their "own." This forces upon the woman the necessity of securing for herself the right to the life of which she must otherwise be deprived; and pecuniary independence becomes the first object, as it is the first requirement of her life. The pecuniary independence of men, the source of their power, lies entirely in the special training which they receive for trades and professions. A good general education helps them, that is, it gives the key which unlocks the outer door; but it unlocks none of the mysteries belonging to special departments, and this is the reason that so many young fellows, even college bred, take up minor positions as ill-paid clerks, office assist-

ants, and the performance of still humbler services, struggling with poverty all their days, because, when thrown upon their resources, the education they had received had been found to fit them for nothing in particular.

There is no hardship, there is nothing even disagreeable in *knowing* many things, so as to be able to turn them to account, and there is this advantage about the domestic, and decorative style of much that is special and tolerably lucrative in the occupations of women, that they can be acquired without the expenditure of much time, while still engaged in other pursuits, and without interfering with the regular routine of life at home. Boys often spend years in the acquisition of a calling by which they can earn a living, after having spent many more years in preparatory study.

Supposing a girl to be relieved from the present necessity of providing her own subsistence, as the majority of them are, she can, while making herself of great use at home, and mixing in society quite as much as is good for her, still find time for learning half a dozen different trades, or occupations, all of which could be put to practical use.

Decorative painting, wood-cutting, and the like have become very largely mechanical arts, readily acquired up to a certain point, and susceptible of improvement, according to the degree of natural taste, aptitude, and faculty for application. These are recreative employments, which may be acquired and followed as a relief to more severe labor, yet they are quite capable of yielding in energetic hands a very handsome subsistence.

A knowledge of millinery and dress-making ought to be a part of every girl's education, so that she will not only be able to make her own clothing, but apply correct principles in determining the value of the work of other people. These special branches can be acquired as part of the curriculum of general education, and are already made a part of it in some schools, thus actually fitting the girl, on leaving off technical study, not only for increased usefulness in her own family, but also for earning her living, and if she is clever, intelligent and energetic, laying the foundation of future fortune. A good dress-maker finds her occupation more lucrative and quite as honorable as that of a poor doctor, and the knowledge of it does not take half the time, nor half the money, nor half the hard study to obtain.

It is rather a misfortune that in business so many women occupy subordinate positions, and so few the controlling ones, and the reason is that the majority seek them late, and having had no early business experience, are never able to fit themselves for more than the regular performance of a dull, mechanical routine, which is uninteresting, and but little profitable.

The exceptions to this state of things are usually to be found among the German, or English portion of the population, and the reason is, that the girls in families where a "store" is the means of livelihood, are early "turned in," to keep accounts, make change, and the

like, their Saturday afternoons and holidays being spent in this way, while the daughters in American families are taking walks, and "making calls," in all the glory of new bonnets and embroidered handkerchiefs.

"If my daughter does not get married, I shall make her my assistant, and perhaps take her into partnership," remarked a German butcher to me the other day; "she is the smartest 'boy' I have got."

Success in business requires a practical knowledge of all its details, and this is rarely acquired late in life. Business proprietorship is however the way of making a livelihood which demands the least, and gives the most in return for the time and strength expended; and when the risk is not so great as to involve a large amount of nerve pressure and anxiety, and other conditions have been so considered in the beginning as to render them tolerably favorable, the position is eminently adapted to the capacity of women, to their faculty for dealing with minutia, and of using brain instead of muscle to solve the problem of life. How to acquire the special training for business pursuits is a problem for girls to consider. In large cities, in New York especially, it has been solved for many by necessity, and there is no doubt that the myriads of girls employed as accountants, as cashiers, as "cash" girls, and many other minor capacities as well as positions of trust, are in numerous instances the business proprietors of the future. But these girls were taken from their homes at six, seven, eight, and ten years of age, have had only just so much "school" as enables them to write their name and keep accounts; the experience they get in their daily routine being the most valuable part of their education. Their range therefore is very narrow; they know and will know nothing outside of it, and this deprives their present or future place in it of much that would give it value. On the other hand, if educated girls, the daughters of our business men, made themselves acquainted with the details, shared to some extent in the plans, and showed their sympathy and interest in some other way than the effort to test the bank account, it would enlarge their horizon, and add to their resources in more ways than one, and strengthen any natural capacity they may possess for stepping into the breach, should one be made. The greatest curse of the young women of to-day is the fear of knowing how to do anything that is considered "common." Yet the knowledge of the common and the universal is necessary to success in the uncommon and the special; and the training of the eyes, the hands, or any or all of the senses, organs, and faculties, while they are fresh, young, and susceptible of cultivation is half the point gained when an effort is to be made in any given direction.

There is not the least danger of knowing too much, but there is danger of wasting precious time on what is unsuitable, or what is not true and good in itself, and therefore not permanent or valuable.

One of the great and almost untrodden fields for women in this country is the cultivation of small properties, farms, nurseries,

and the like. For this work women are especially fitted, and the healthful outdoor life it involves is just what very many need to restore soundness to the form, freshness and beauty to the skin, elasticity to the step, and brightness to the eyes. Then the independence and luxury of such a mode of life is superior to any other that can be made productive of a livelihood.

Our lady proprietor of twenty acres of arable land is a queen in her own right. She has fruit, poultry, cream, fresh vegetables, the whitest bread, and sweetest butter on her table every day. She rides in her own carriage, and has the rough work of her domain done by hired hands; but she *knows how* everything should be done. She can on a pinch do it herself, and she does do many things which it would be unsafe to trust to others; but this is much better than washing for a living, or living a dependant on the reluctant hand of charity!

The number of women who have made small farms a success, who have brought up and educated families upon them, who have taken care of invalid relatives through the means they provided, who have found a renewal of their own youth, health and strength, in the freedom and activity they brought, is a strong argument in favor of small proprietary interests for women as a resource against calamity, and a stimulus to the acquirement of the practical experience in the cultivation of the diversified interests of a small demesne, which is necessary to success. It is not city girls alone who are ignorant of the details of a country life, it is country-bred girls, and even the daughters of farmers, nurserymen, and gardeners.

It is quite common in the country for the cultivation of flowers, and useful and ornamental plants, as well as fruits, to be dependant on the father of the family, or the spasmodic efforts of the "boys," upon farms and homesteads which could not afford to support hired labor, except of the most necessary kind; yet while the parents are straining every nerve to give the daughters a college-course, or a year, more or less, at this or that expensive school, the daughter or daughters themselves realize neither their own interest nor the obligation of duty, in sharing the labors and making common stock of the efforts to advance the general welfare. Young ideas improved by reading, by absence of prejudice, would often exercise a salutary influence if modestly, judiciously, and naturally brought to bear upon the as naturally growing inflexibility of old ones, and both would be the better for the mutual action.

No better or more helpful work could be done than the development of a class of women farmers, the cultivators of small domains from twenty to fifty acres, or less, who would take girls as apprentices, and teach them how to cultivate land on a small scale profitably. As one of them has said, the only way to do this is by raising the quality, and therefore the value of the productions; and this is only achieved on the farm, in the workshop, or the atelier, by the special training of natural faculties in the given direction.