

Talks with Girls.

BY JENNIE JUNE.

REST AND RESTFULNESS.



WHAT is rest? That it is not always sitting still, as is generally supposed, it requires only a moment to understand. "What rests you the most?" I asked a literary friend one day. "First, getting out of doors; second, seeing and talking with people; third, going to the theater or opera." "What do you find the most restful?" was asked of another literary friend, a woman who spends her days in hard, delving, literary work, which requires a vast amount of reading and searching for authorities. "Oh! going out and seeing people," was the ready answer. "Nothing rests me like that. My friends often say to me, when I am very tired after a hard day's work, 'Why do you not stay at home and rest, instead of dressing and fatiguing yourself by going to a reception?' But I assure them that staying at home and sitting still, after sitting still at work all day, is not 'rest' to me; on the contrary, if I am obliged to do that, or continue my work through the evening, as not unfrequently happens, I am depressed and unfit for work the next day; while, if I conquer my unwillingness to move, go out into freshness and activity, meet pleasant people, exchange ideas or get the benefit of theirs, I come home strengthened, brightened, and ready to take up my work again with accustomed energy."

This is the testimony of nine out of every ten of those persons, men or women, who perform literary labor for daily bread, or pursue it as a regular occupation. Of course circumstances alter cases, and much depends on the possibility of meeting the right kind of people in the right way, and without the sacrifice of too much time, health, and strength. If very full or very elaborate evening dress was required, the trouble would more than counterbalance the good to be derived by a worker. If the gathering was a mere jam of empty-headed persons, assembled to stare at each other's clothes and eat a gorgeous but unhealthful supper, then it is easy to be seen that the result must be detrimental rather than otherwise, and certainly not restful to mind or body.

But the question is simply the abstract one of what rest is to different people and under different circumstances—not one of ethics at all.

Mr. Bancroft, the historian, found the greatest rest and pleasure of his life in music,

especially the Italian opera, upon which he was a regular attendant during the season for many years. Rain or shine, he always occupied his seat, and from the moment the curtain rose, seemed to divest his mind of everything else, and gave his undivided attention to the harmony of sweet sounds.

A gentleman engaged upon a very abstruse literary work, remarked recently that he went every night, sometimes for weeks together, during its progress, to a minstrel entertainment, simply to laugh and get rid of thinking.

The literary receptions which were initiated by Miss Alice Cary twenty-five or thirty years ago, and which were the beginning of the delightful social life of literary people in New York, and more or less all over this country, were doubtless the outgrowth of a necessity for that restful companionship and interchange, which persons who lead secluded intellectual lives seem above all others to need. Women, particularly single women, are, and were much more at that time, shut out from all possibility of association with other lives. The darkness, the very time when social life begins, shut them in as with an impenetrable wall; they could not leave home without an escort; they could not have an escort without subjecting themselves and him to unpleasant remarks and suspicions; they could not attend theater, opera, or concert, except by invitation of a gentleman, and yet if they ventured to accept such an invitation, the consequences were not always pleasant, so that for many reasons such chances could not be relied upon to afford any regular alternative to the monotony of daily life. Receiving friends informally, without preparation, without restriction, did not take the Cary sisters away from their own home; but it brought at least new interest, new life, new thought, and fresh activity into their home; while from the sweetness and integrity of their lives went out an influence which has been known and felt all over the land, and has done even more to rid the social atmosphere of false ideas than their work has accomplished for literature.

Perhaps it would have been better, and more restful, in this sense of reviving and restoring, for them to have gone out of their home, and out of themselves more, instead of bringing the outer world into their own lives; but they did the only thing they could do, and they did it so well that it made a new departure in social life, and created any number of half-way houses, where weary pilgrims of both sexes have and are finding the kind of rest they need.

Ministers, pastors of churches, are at a great disadvantage in finding rest, that is, change from the serious and wearisome monotony of their lives. Nature abhors monotony as much as it does a vacuum, and always contrives to show displeasure, and take revenge on those who walk too long in the same beaten track. The deterioration of character in ministers' children, especially sons, which has passed into a proverb, is accounted for on this principle—it is the revolt of the human in the parents, and particularly in the father, against the system of repression; the public opinion

which forbids the most innocent and necessary recreations, which insists that ministers, as a class, are not, and shall not be as other men, and that rest, that is, association and interchange, or activities outside of a fixed routine, are not either necessary or even permitted.

This code has been greatly modified during the past few years, and the general morality, the character of ministers and their families will be benefited by it. When ministers are permitted to be more human, they and theirs will be more divine. No man or woman ought to be restricted to gravity, to the use of only one set of the muscles of his face, and those the ones that exercise a detrimental influence upon his nerves; thought, in one direction, if intense enough, and protracted long enough, creates insanity.

Farmers know that soil, planted year after year with the same kind of seed, refuses, after a while, to produce a crop; it must have a change, that change is rest, although it is planted and yields as much as ever of something else, some opposite kind of crop. It is always the old story of the goose that laid the golden egg; and there is wisdom in all those old stories; but the truth is we kill the goose to get the egg to-day just as fast, and just as foolishly, as the worthies we consider so absurd centuries ago. Women cling, probably, more than men to the idea that rest means absolute quietude, keeping still, and nothing more; and this idea they carry out, sometimes to their own great detriment.

A woman who lives indoors, needs for a change to get out of doors; this is the great want in the lives of ninety-nine women out of every hundred. In cities there are attractions,—they can make errands, "excuses" they are called, for getting into the street; in the country there is no motive, and after a time indoor work drags so that the responsible housekeeper cannot spare a moment, except for a few moments upon the lounge, or a small tussle with the stocking basket. If her leisure was spent out of doors, or in neighborly society—in a ladies' reading or debating club, or even in making a call, she would find herself better fitted to begin her routine, take up the interminable round of small duties, of which no one can ever understand the drudgery, the wear and tear upon the body and mind, except those who have to perform them.

A great many women so resent this failure on the part of those about to realize the necessities of their position, that they will not take advantage of the opportunities they might make for themselves. They assert that they "have no time" for improvement, for neighborly converse, for walking or for riding, for anything but going through the round of petty duties, which, performed without any break upon their monotony, produce in time a species of melancholia or insanity. A determined effort, on the contrary; a dose of out-door air, of intelligent interchange of thought—even if it is taken as a medicine, with a wry face—will act as a charm, and soon be anticipated as a blessing, a sweetener of life.

Women who vary their work, and add to it a little play, can do twice as much. Languor, inertia, is the revenge which the body takes upon us for wearing out one set of faculties,

leaving the others unemployed. Using the brain to save work is much better than compelling the hands to perform a ceaseless round of labor, of which the sanitary result is very doubtful; there is a great deal in putting time and faculty to the best use. There are women who consider themselves "slaves" to their families, and who do toil early and late to keep them in doughnuts and cookies, and "pie," and "sauce," and pickles, and "pot-cheese," and what not—who yet do not make home pleasant for either husband or children. She is always cooking or cleaning, or she is always "tired," and generally cross, and when she hears what other women are doing in the way of public, or social, or home-decorative work, she feels as if it was an indirect reflection upon her efficiency, and blames husband and children, her hard lot—everything and everybody but herself.

Doubtless her husband, her children, and her whole life have grown hard and exacting, and the former somewhat indifferent to her moods; but is not this her own fault? They are as she has made them. She has accustomed them to certain things, and very naturally they look for them, perhaps after a while they demand them. A little more exact knowledge will teach women that something is due to themselves, that their own body requires perpetual care and recreating, and that its future health and harmony depends upon the materials which are daily and hourly put into the work. It does not live by bread alone, though good and healthful food is necessary to its sustenance, but it takes something from whatever it is brought in contact with—the atmosphere, people, and the inspiration of a new thought. A sensible man will assist his wife to put variety, and above all, quickening intellectual influences into her life, because it reacts so beneficially upon the home, the children, and their social surroundings. But women can do much themselves toward enlarging their own outlook, broadening their own ideas, and changing their own conditions, by taking advantage of the opportunities within their reach, and making new ones instead of waiting for the new ones to be thrust upon them, or refusing them when they are presented. There are farmers' wives who will call their husbands or sons from field work to ride two miles to the "store" for some small article which is necessary, or has been forgotten, when it ought to be one of their recreations to take the butter, or the eggs, and exchange them, or in some other way obtain the family supplies. The farmer does not need this additional "outdoors," but he is usually glad to take advantage of it, because he meets his cronies in the village, and has a chance to post himself on the latest bit of political gossip. His outdoor life and work make rest by the fireside, or in the shadow of a cool room, precious to him; and if he has wife or daughters, who, in the brief intervals of other and more exacting duties, can find time to read aloud the interesting parts of magazines or newspapers, they would find the occasionally prejudiced and somewhat unreasonable head of the family more willing to supply them.

It is a common practice in the country

among people who retire early, and sleep, or have the opportunity of doing so with the utmost regularity, to spend their leisure in the middle of the day in taking a "nap." This is absurd, it is not what is needed. Take a book out of doors under a tree, or bring one into the house, or practice on some musical instrument if you are so fortunate as to be able to play on one, or take up a study and pursue it in these brief moments. Whatever you do, let it be something quite opposite and different to the usual course and tenor of your life; let the change be the employment of an entirely different set of faculties; the night furnishes enough of absolute rest, if you are able to employ it for that purpose.

One of the most fastidious young men of a fashionable set astonished his friends and his family, not very long since, by starting on a cruise in a whaling vessel. The outcry on all sides was great. He had been accustomed to have every wish consulted; a spot on tablecloth or napkin took away his appetite. Whoever was sacrificed for the comfort of visitors, or unforeseen accidents, Fred's whims, Fred's tastes, and Fred's prejudices were always respected. His appetite was peculiarly delicate, and he could not eat at all in any near proximity to persons less refined in their habits than himself.

His mother, always watchful and tender of his comfort, trembled at the hardships he would have to experience, and could not understand his voluntary choice of such a mode of spending a summer holiday. His father understood it better. Said he, "The boy is tired to death of your kid-glove performances. He wants a change from the routine of a life which he begins to realize makes no drafts upon his manhood." This was the condition of affairs precisely, and his mother began to realize it when letters came back to her filled with glowing descriptions of a life of daily struggle, contest, and muscular activity—of nights spent in a cloak, blanket, or strip of canvas, upon deck with the planks for a pillow—of food made up of "hard tack" and bacon, with bread and molasses for a treat, and molasses as the only sweetening for coffee—tea was a luxury unknown.

The desire for and enjoyment of a "rest" and "holiday" of this description was the natural revolt of strength against the weakness and effeminacy forced upon it by the conventions and refinements of modern life. "Extremes" are said to "meet," and they do. Over-indulgence in luxury produces weakness and disease, as does poverty. We need the possession and use of all our faculties, bodily and mental, for health, and the effects of disuse are very much like those of abuse; both result in incapacity at last.

Much of the ill health, and many of the diseased conditions in the world, are due to our narrowness, to our prejudices, to the determination of individuals to cut every other individual according to their cloth, and by a pattern of their choosing. Public opinion has been created which has made it next to impossible, in some communities wholly so, for certain persons or classes of persons to go outside of certain fixed rules, unwritten but inflexible, in the conduct of their daily life. Possibly it

never occurred to the makers of this public opinion, that, to say a man or woman shall not run, or dance, or work, or wear such clothing as suits them, or seek such relief and companionship as different states of mind and body require, is to destroy health and crush out manhood and womanhood; but it does do this, nevertheless, and then comes the revenge, which gives us suppression and repression, in the form of wicked children of seemingly good parents,—of shocking scandal or dreadful crime which makes the hair of the whole community stand on end, and wonder where we are to look for goodness, and "pooh-pooh!" the talk of scientists about hereditary influence!

Great advances have been made of late years, and even ministers are now admitted to need "rest" from the parochial white cravat, the long face, the studied walk, the monotonous round of prayer-meetings unbroken—for every occasion of joyous festivity must be turned into a conventicle if the "minister" be present. Human nature could not but become depraved under such circumstances and restrictions, whether it was so in the first place or not; and if the depravity did not break out in one way, it would in another; if not in father, in son; if not in crime, in loss of reason or mental power. It has been remarked frequently that clergymen flock in a body to Saratoga as soon as the summer recess begins, and it is probably not altogether the efficacy of the waters which induces so many of them to choose this fashionable center as a summer resort. It is its brightness, its gayety, its entire rest and change from the enforced stiffness and starch of their daily lives at home, which must be hard to endure by a man of large and liberal, not necessarily "bad," nature. It is a pity that school-teachers and quiet drudges of every description could not take a summer rest at Saratoga, or somewhere, in the midst of plenty of people and a joyous activity. Fashionable belles, on the contrary, would be better off for a rest in a farm-house, or in doing the cooking and the incidental housework of a "cottage in some vast wilderness," or a camping-out expedition.

It will be seen, therefore, that *rest* is many-sided, and of many kinds; that sometimes it means activity, sometimes hard work, but always a total change from what we have been doing, from the usual habits, the actual circumstances which have preceded it. To obtain this rest, we must be careful not to fill our lives with the spirit of unrest, or imagine that we must eternally jump from one thing to another in order to preserve an equilibrium. All our faculties need exercise, but not in the same degree. We do not need to divide our days between laughing and crying; the most of us prefer the "even tenor" which excites neither smiles nor tears; yet we may be the "better" in more ways than one for a "good laugh," or a "good cry." Does not "George Eliot" say somewhere, that one way of getting at the misfortunes of our kind is to look upon their pleasures? and it is only another way of saying that the varied experiences of life are all necessary to teach us human sympathy, and from the infinite forms of work alone can we draw any correct conclusions as to the "rest" which each one needs, and is hoping for in the future.