TALKS WITH WOMEN.

HEAD BEFORE THE BROOKLYN WOMAN'S CLUB, NOVEMBER 4TH.

JENK FRYE.

THE OBJECT OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN.

The object of the higher education of women has been so much talked about of late years, so many schemes have been put forward, and so many announcements made of the great things that have been, and are being done for them—that it is not any wonder if people generally imagine the immense amount of confusion and misapprehension that has been done for them, and that confusion has come out thoroughly educated and accomplished women it is their own fault.

It is only by being girls ourselves, or having daughters to educate that we learn how limited the opportunities still are, how little the requirements for thorough education for women are understood, or how difficult it is to realize a broad conception of the training and preparation required to fit girls for future fields of usefulness.

Nor is the prospect in the future so hopeful as some seem to imagine. The experiments in the way of what is called the "higher education of girls," have not been altogether so successful as we could wish. Wealthy parents still continue to send their daughters to expensive boarding-schools, where the object is avowedly to avoid anything like practical accuracy, or thoroughness; and parents of smaller means, and lower degree, who at the cost of much personal sacrifice and self-denial have obtained the best school, and college training that they knew for their daughters, have found themselves confronted at the close by two stern facts, the inadequacy of the modern girls' physique to sustain protracted mental and physical exertion, and the almost impossibility of putting her book knowledge to practical use. Moreover, in nineteen cases out of twenty where there are still further efforts have been made—where school, and college, have been supplemented by special training for a profession which promised more satisfactory results, young women have reached the threshold of a career only to be absorbed in the nearer and dearer cares of wedded life.

That the relation between morality and education is less than has been supposed without doubt; if the records of men that cannot read or write are traced in our police reports, the record of men that can, are to be found among bank depositors and Credit Managers. I do not say, as I am told, of the case of a man who, with what Mr. Spenser said, and probably it was something more than he meant. Words that represent things, that convey to us all we know of art, of music, of poetry, that preserve to us by a nobler process than emblazoning, the deeds and lives of great and good men, and women, are not simply black characters traced upon white paper, they are among the best agencies in the highest and most perfect culture. Culture, therefore, has a more general education, a more special value; one supplements and heightens the lustre of the other, although for special purposes neither could take the place of the other. The habits of women, their home life, their sedentary occupations, predispose them to thought, reflection, and comparison, and they very often show the result of the cultivation of those faculties, when their acquired knowledge of the most meagre and superficial description. We have few examples in history of women educated for special purposes, but we have many who achieved society distinction, and even wider renown, without any education at all, or at least, without any such as we should designate by the term education today.

This was not because women were not capable of being educated, there are many examples to prove that, but because education was not thought necessary for them. It must always be remembered that women have achieved in the past has been in spite of public opinion, in despite of circumstances, in despite of the most powerful agencies, individual and social, which could be brought to bear against them. We cannot predicate their future therefore from their past, as we could that of men; we can only plead that if women have done so much against wind and tide, what could they not do—what might not be expected of them if wind and tide were in their favor?

It will be conceded today by the most strenuous opponent of Woman's Rights, that women would be none the worse for being made acquainted through books and teaching with the world in which...
they have to live. A knowledge of chemical facts and science would unfold to them many mysteries of cookery, and assist housekeeping with a dignity and value which it has never acquired. Acquaintance with plants and flowers, the ability to call them by their names, and test their virtues, would render woods and fields more interesting than dry goods stores, and give sufficient knowledge to order the services of a doctor superfluous in all simple ailments. Even the gray old earth acquires a charm otherwise unknown, if we can look below the surface and read its history written in simple characters by the hand of nature.

All this, and much more, has its place in that store of general knowledge which lays at the foundation of any true system of education, for either men or women. All the principles of social life in which we live should be the common property of both sexes. The thorough knowledge and possession of them are necessary to usefulness no less than to happiness.

The first object in the education of women is to acquaint them with their environment, and then fit them for the place they are to occupy in the scheme. Now the most likely place is mother of children, trainer of men; and she should therefore acquire all the knowledge necessary to acquit herself of this duty in the best schools, according to the best methods, and with the aid of all those instruments and appliances which science has invented to aid the student, but which are rarely found except in institutions of learning devoted exclusively to men. If the general education of boys and girls is conducted together—if, until a certain age, they attended the same classes, heard the same lectures, witnessed the same experiments—that of girls, at least, would be much more thorough and much better calculated to fit them for their natural position of instructor or assistants to their own children, whose difficulties they would know and appreciate.

And perhaps it would be as well to define here the broad distinction which in my opinion should be made between a general and special education. The general education is that which covers ground common to both sexes, and should be I think shared together, or at any rate offered with equal facilities for its acquisition. This would include a thorough knowledge of what are known as the "English branches," and an introduction into the realm of higher mathematics. It should include drawing, and a knowledge thorough as far as it goes, of history, botany, chemistry, and astronomy. In languages it should commence with elementary Latin, and end with an intimate acquaintance with pure French and German.

This stock of knowledge is sufficient for the exigencies of ordinary life, and may be acquired under proper auspices by the time boys and girls have reached the age of sixteen, without pressure or overcrowding. Not acquired in the slip-shod manner in which girls now acquire the usual branches of learning, but in the sense of absolute knowledge and possession, of knowing made facts and principles of their own, and systematized them so as to make them available in after life. This is the end of general education at school. The daughter then goes home to assist her mother in household duties, to be initiated in the mysteries of cooking, to learn the science of housekeeping, to share the light and pleasant family studies in art and literature. As the elder daughter she is sunshine to her parents, the ever loving and willing helper of her younger brothers and sisters, and as the aid and assistant to her mother, she learns to govern a household, guide and control its expenditure, exercise the function of hospitality, and in every way prepare herself for the larger duties and responsibilities of the future.

This is the outline in brief for an education which should make her the intelligent mother, the well-instructed wife, good mother, good daughter, willing and able to bear their part, and do their share of the ordinary work of every-day life.

But we will consider now the object of a special education, and the reasons why its provisions should be widely different for boys and girls.

If girls were always provided for, as they are supposed to be; if every woman’s position was the cared of one a cared for and protected wife and mother; if, accepting the fact and its necessity, government stepped in to the aid of those who by the accidents of life were left unprotected, and afforded them positions by which they could obtain honorable livelihood, and feel the sense of its guardianship over them, there would be less motive to prevent the claims of any woman to special education.

There would still be the consideration due to women of genius; of exceptional capacity, of strong intellectual or acquired tastes in certain directions, to opportunities to gratify those tastes, to pursue the career in which they find best and fullest expression. But as yet, none of the conditions I have mentioned in regard to these sex generally are fulfilled. The majority of girls and women are entered in a blind race with men, without equipment, without preparation, with none of the stimuluses to honorable ambition, and no hope of reward if they achieve success. This reduces the number of those who would strive, to those who are compelled by necessity to do so; misfortune, therefore, takes the place here also of a Pronter unawares, and places them at a double disadvantage; forcing them into a contest for which they have no arms, and in which they are allowed no opportunity.

Under present circumstances therefore, I would supplement the education of all girls with special knowledge by which they can earn a livelihood for themselves, and others, if necessary. It is not of so much importance what it is, for good general knowledge, intelligence, and tact, will enable women as well as men to rise out of low conditions, and make their circumstances to suit themselves, while without these, special knowledge will only enable them to run in a groove, whatever that is—but it is desirable, that where there is possibility of choice, the special aptitudes of women, and their inferior physical strength should be kept in mind.

As yet, the talk in regard to women’s physical incapacity to enter the lists with men has only resulted in compelling them to earn their living in the hardest way—by washing, by cooking, by sewing for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four, by being the employees of men, and doing the work for which men get the pay, by earning a livelihood in short, whenever obliged to do so, by the hardest, and most continuous labor.

This is the power in the woman, by acquiring proficiency in better paid fields, to alter. If a man’s position is not, or others of whom the same were not available, I would have her taught millinery, dress-making, wood-engraving, photography, or perhaps two, or three of these, as resources against the unforeseen emergencies of the future, but it would be better still for her to be made acquainted with business, or thoroughly versed in a profession art, journalism, or medicine, because in these, in two of them at least, the doors are open, and the rewards are equal to those of men.

The aptitude of women for business is not sufficiently appreciated or understood. In all my years of acquaintance with them, I have never known one to fail where they were unhampered by men. We have a business woman in New York, who has made a fortune of nearly a million dollars, owns a magnificent residence up-town, with conservatories, beautiful grounds, and the like. She has set her husband up in separate business three different times, and each time he has failed. Now she is the one and only person that nothing more. She says she cannot afford to "set him up" in business again.

In not a few families the boys are drummed up, and shamed into business activity, while girls are restrained from it, and where, through incompetency, want of precaution, or business they fail, the girls furnish the means for a fresh start from the meagre returns of hard, daily labor.

I am not among those who approve of women combining the functions of wife, mother, house-keeper, and bread-winner. No woman can do this with justice to herself, her husband, her children, and the outside pursuit in which she is engaged; but in transition periods a choice must often be made between two evils, and the shortcomings inseparable from bearing a double burden are less and better borne than the perplexed and actual encounter with the real and terrible spectres of want and privation.

Men, husbands, and fathers are bound either to provide for women, or allow them, and as far as possible assist them with opportunities, to provide for themselves, by less meagre and drudging methods than those by which the majority now gain a wretched subsistence.

I confess to all faith in what such schools as Vassar and Wellesley do to better the condition of girls and future women. The scheme is too general, the ideas too transcendental, the instruments which it puts into their hands not sufficiently practical or available.

Selected mainly from the middle class, the students of the new female colleges throughout the country are usually sent at the cost...
A ROMANCE OF THE RHINE.

BY MARIE PLAIX.

The Rhine, almost on the boundary line of the German States, lies the little town of M——. Tourists passing through it now would find nothing worthy of more than a slight notice in inhabitants or village; but long before the rude sounds of war disturbed its peace and prosperity, a quiet tragedy occurred there, which no doubt by this time, has completely escaped the memory of the oldest burgher.

Perhaps tragedy is a formidable name for my small romance; for though it involved the life of one person, it was neither a startling murder nor a mysterious suicide. Still, it is death from a broken heart as much a murder as death from a broken head. It is at least as fatal to the victim, so we'll adhere to the title of tragedy.

M——, as I said before, is situated on the banks of the Rhine, and far down the village, in fact, just on the outskirts, stood the small vine-covered cottage where dwelt my heroine and her aged grandmother.

They were poor, so poor, that the grandmother's spinning-wheel and Mini's daily embroidery barely supplied them with the scantiest comforts, but wealth and poverty shared alike in the favor of the humble people, and Mina possessing a plenty far in excess of any heart, always returned the prices for beauty and amiability at the festivals and German sports, and held undisputed sway among the villagers. Of course she had sources of lover's and could enter in the list the son of more than one wealthy landowner; but Mini, simple peasant that she was, readily distinguished the difference between real gold and dross. So, when she gave her heart and promised her hand to Fritz Ehrenstein, the betrothed received the willing consent of her grandmother, and was followed by the hearty good wishes of all their friends. Had they married and remained in their native village, all would have been well; but like most of the foreigners, who foolishly leave home and friends under the impression that by coming to America they can easily acquire wealth and position, Fritz became dissatisfied with his humble home and pursuits, and finally resolved to forsake the goal of seeking his fortune in the far-away land. Unwilling to depart without Mina, he earnestly urged her to accompany him. But what would become of her grandmother in the metropolis? Too old and feeble to work, she had no living relative but Mini, and was unwilling to be a burden to any of her friends. She utterly refused to accompany the young people, fearing the long voyage and disliking to leave the old Fatherland; but though she did not oppose Mini's going, the intractable lip and starting tear told plainly how the thought of separation grieved her.

And Mini? Ah, it was hard to decide, especially in the future, as gloomily portrayed by Fritz—of his snug little home and happy married life. On the other, the picture of her old grandmother in her lonely cottage, with no one to cheer or comfort her in her old age. It is true that the neighbors who lived near would care for her for Mini's sake, as well as for her own; but suppose she should die alone in the cottage, no one near her—no one to hear the last words of her dear Mini! But how could she let Fritz go alone and friendless in that new life? Would not the parting be as hard for her as for him? Then across the perplexed girl's mind would flash the thought of how her dying parents left her to her grandmother's loving care, and how faithfully the grandmother had fulfilled their last requests. No, she was to remain with her aged relative, and all Fritz's pleadings and reproaches proved unavailing. So they parted, with grief on both sides, but anger as well on his; and to all his efforts to compel her to promise to cross the ocean when he sent for her, she could only say she would if her grandmother would go, or—if she hesitated, then, for it seemed heartless to speculate on the probability of her grandmother's death. So Fritz crossed the ocean, leaving Mini sorrowful and sad to think he had left her in anger. But the thought of doing what was right, and Fritz's image she appreciated the merited, and tried with kind words and loving actions to restore the joyous smiles and looks to Mini's pretty face.

But the poor girl felt lonely and unhappy until she received a letter...