

girls at the beginning of this century and that which is now within their reach is widely different—the one so meagre, the other so liberal. It is stated that one of the reasons of the early emigration of our forefathers was the difficulty of securing an education for their girls in the old country. Even fifty years ago the education of the people was left almost entirely to private industry. There were no good schools in the United Kingdom for girls, and those that existed were as a rule held in ill-ventilated rooms and presided over by very illiterate people—people who were quite incapable of exercising and training the intelligence, and who certainly were not competent to exercise any good moral influence on the girls.

As short a time back as twenty years England ranked last of all the civilised nations of the earth with regard to education. A great statistician, speaking of the education of the English people at that time, said, "The schools are very bad, and yet much more is being done in them than formerly."

In 1872 education was made compulsory in England, and, indeed, it was time for the Government to make a vigorous effort in that direction, seeing that a large proportion of the population of both sexes was unable to read and write, and statistics showed that out of every hundred men who married, thirty-two were unable to sign their names in the register, and out of a hundred women forty-eight were unable to sign it. And this is not all. Ignorance of common words and phrases amongst the girls was quite remarkable. The following is but one example.

I was on a visit at a vicarage about ten miles from London, when one afternoon a respectable-looking girl of about twenty and a young man came to the church vestry to announce their desire of "being asked in church." The clerk, in a business-like manner, with his book before him, addressing the girl, asked—

"Your name?"

"Mary Bean, sir," was the answer.

"Spinster?" he continued.

Receiving no answer, he looked up, and to his astonishment, found the girl looking very red and angry. At the question being put a second time, she broke out in choked voice and with angry gesture, "Spinster! No, indeed! and I should like to know how you dare to call respectable girls such names, trying to take away their characters. No, sir, I am not a spinster, I am a respectable servant, and my mistress will speak to my character." And turning to her companion, said, "Come away, John, I'd rather not be married at all than be married here, where decent folk are insulted."

And away they went, to the great distress of the clerk, who came to tell the vicar the occurrence.

Ours was not the only country in which the education of girls was neglected. In Italy fifty-three out of every hundred girls and women were unable to write, and thirty seven per cent. could neither read nor write. In Belgium girls' education was almost entirely neglected. In France thirty-seven per cent. of the female population could neither read nor write. In Sardinia the education of girls was not only entirely neglected, but considered superfluous and dangerous. In Russia the little that was done to educate girls was done so badly as to be worse than useless. In the States, south and south-west of New York and New Jersey, notwithstanding the efforts made, nearly all the girls and women were without the commonest education.

In Algiers there were a few boys' schools in which the boys simply learned to read, but there was no provision made for teaching the girls whatever. In China only one woman

in a hundred could read. In the West Indies it was forbidden to teach the Negro either to read or write. In India scarcely a girl in ten thousand could read or write, or play any musical instrument. The women were kept in ignorance, some by their poverty, some by the jealous fears of their husbands, and more than all because no provision was made for teaching them. Ignorance was esteemed the safeguard of rank and morality. For the very few who could read the books were too corrupt to place in their hands, and thus it ever is where the women are kept in ignorance and deprived of their influence. In fact, look where you will, with one or two exceptions, such as Holland, Saxony, and Prussia, you will find that fifty years ago scarcely any provision was made for the intellectual improvement of women and girls. The picture is very different now, as you may see by the figures at the end of the chapter.

The cry is not an uncommon one that we are spending too much money on education in this age; but statistics prove that the money so spent is the best outlay the world ever made—that by its means the criminal population under thirty is decreasing rapidly, and much of the sordid poverty and depravity common among some classes are gradually being got rid of. Take, for example, the work of education in London; it has reduced the number of criminals fifty per cent., and so marvellously has it dealt with the habits and manners of the people that the head of the police declares that if things go on as now, there will soon be nothing left for the police to do.

To transform an uneducated population into a well educated, responsible, thinking people is not the work of a moment. It requires years of steady working to develop the physical, intellectual, and moral powers of a people. That this country and many others have made rapid strides in this direction no one doubts for a moment.

The increased opportunities of education and intellectual improvement have had a most beneficial result on the character of the girls of all lands; it may be seen in a hundred ways by the most unobservant of onlookers. They are less idle, less improvident, less depressed, less inclined to turn to frivolous pleasures in order to drown their sorrows, less given to gossiping and scandal. They are better daughters, better wives, and better citizens; their pleasures and recreations are of a higher class; they are more careful to preserve the dignity of woman, because they are awaking to its existence. Even in the poorest homes you may see the effect of the better education, in the struggle to keep up appearances, by a greater cleanliness and neatness, and by a desire to avoid debt. In the higher social position the good result of a better class of education is equally noticeable, and we have the assurance of Mr. Mundella that never in the history of our country has there been so much real and effective religious instruction going on as at present.

It has been a matter of great interest to discover how much power of learning girls have—whether there are any subjects better learned by them than by boys, and what subjects they fail to do as well.

Of course, there are two subjects peculiar to girls' schools, and with which boys have nothing to do, viz., needlework and cooking. The first of these the various Governments of the world encourage in every way, and it is the opinion of examiners that needlework, properly taught, develops in girls moral and intellectual qualities in a very marked degree. Their opinion is that it trains them in habits of observation, precision, patience, neatness, and order; that it teaches forethought, contrivance, and economy.

These are qualities which tend at once to

sharpen the wit and strengthen the character, and which prove valuable to girls of every condition of life—indeed, a good practical knowledge of needlework is essential to mothers; the saving it effects is in itself an income.

"No home," says an inspector, "can be attractive to a man where the wife is slatternly and the children in rags; when there is no stitch in time to save the nine, and where the waste caused by unmade clothes is an incessant drain on his slender resources." It is a shallow prejudice which regards needlework as beneath a clever girl's notice.

Cooking is now being taught in many of our schools, and that girls are enjoying and profiting by the lessons may be seen in the fact that last year the Government grants were bestowed on 7,597 girls in England and Wales, and the result may be seen clearly in the agricultural districts, where the food of the poor is much better and more economically cooked than formerly. These two subjects special to girls, if well taught and made practical, will make their mark in many homes and give an increase of comfort and order to a large portion of the population. Everything which tends to increase the comfort, order, and happiness of our homes is worth cultivating.

(To be continued.)

OUR LAKE.

By CLARA THWAITES.

EVEN Christmas trees lose their charm in time, and we set our wits to work to find some novelty for the children, some new environment for gifts and toys at Christmastide.

To those who frequent bazaars and sales of work "Our Lake" will be no novelty, perhaps, but to many a quiet country home it may prove a happy thought, as it did in our "home among the hills." Secrecy in preparation is a great matter in our pleasant scheme. Keep doors shut, dear mothers and elder sisters, while you call into existence in some large recess in your home, or in some boudoir, a gleaming lake surrounded with waving ferns, orange trees, or whatever forms of beauty you can find in your own or a neighbour's conservatory. The neatest housewife need not feel uneasy at bringing a lake into her pretty domains, as the materials composing it are dry.

Procure from your ironmonger a large sheet of polished tin (you can probably hire it for a trifle) and a sufficient quantity of Virginian cork to form an irregular border around it. Some stout brown paper, folded double, should be placed around the edge of the tin and surrounding carpet to preserve them from injury by damp pots and ivy. The cork will form a pretty border when placed irregularly and informally among the drooping ferns, *Osmunda regalis*, and other feathery growths, which will cluster around our mimic lake. Hide the pots with wreaths of ivy and evergreens, and on one side of the lake form a rustic bridge, over which the young anglers can cast their lines. (A small bench, with a back to it, from the village school, will answer this purpose, *faute de mieux*, or you will devise something to your mind.)

Our "fish" are candies, bonbons, preserved fruits, or more valuable gifts, folded in papers that are gold, silver, pink, or yellow, and neatly tied up. Each tiny parcel has a loop attached to it, which the hook of the skillful angler will catch up. Put some of your fish in the pond, keeping a reserve which may be thrown in when the pond is empty.

Our fishing-rods—let there be two—may be of the simplest description, with a string and hook attached to each, and the young anglers find it an exciting amusement to catch fish in "Our Lake."