

"Yes, I know," in a low voice. "I was thinking about that last night. I am afraid she will not like it, and it troubles me a little. We are not rich, and——"

"What does that matter?" with a touch of impatience. "I thought you were free from that sort of nonsense, Bessie."

"It does not matter to us," replied Bessie, with a slight emphasis on the "us" that was exquisite to Richard's ear. "I am only speaking of Mrs. Sefton; but she is not your own mother, and she has never made you happy, and she has no right to prevent you pleasing yourself."

"That is spoken like a sensible girl. I must thank you for that speech. Your father said much the same thing to me. 'You are your own master,' he remarked, 'and your stepmother has no right to control your choice; but, knowing her as I do, she will not be pleased.'"

"You will tell her as soon as possible, will you not—and Edna too?"

"I will tell them this morning. You must leave everything to me. You shall be subjected to no unpleasantness that I can prevent. And, Bessie, I am going to take you down to Cliffe. I have made my mind up to that."

"Very well," she said, with a smile. And it was a new thing for Richard to assert himself and meet with no contradiction; and as he looked at the girl beside him, and met her clear, candid glance, his heart swelled within him for very gratitude.

"It is getting late; we must go home now," observed Bessie, wondering a little at his sudden silence.

"Yes, we will go home," he replied, rousing himself. "I was just thinking, dear, what life will mean to me when I have you beside me."

(To be continued.)

A LANCE FOR THE LILY.

THE age of chivalry is dead. Far down in the dim past, looming ghostlike through the mist of centuries, moves the form of the great Lancelot—the flower of knighthood, and rank by rank the knights of later days have been swept away by the resistless onset of time, till the historic field is filled with heaps of the forgotten dead—pale lips that never again will sing their lady's praise, and powerless arms that never more will hold a lance in rest for the honour of stainless maidenhood.

The age of chivalry is dead, and men no longer maintain the cause of those they love by knightly skill in the lists or fair encounter on the open field, for the age of progress is upon us, and what was done by hard blows then is now accomplished more conveniently by smart practice and short weights.

The conditions of female life also are changed and changing; moreover it is undeniable that on the whole they are improved, but the assertion of this pleasing fact is in the highest degree superfluous, for the boasted age of progress is nothing if not self-complacent.

It is then unnecessary to add one feeble note to the chorus of mutual congratulation which this improvement in the position of English-women has called forth, or to join in the loud-voiced demand for further developments of the system of so-called female emancipation. The object of this short article is rather to deter the crowd of would-be reformers, lest their eager feet should trample down many a lovely meadow flower; lest the dim religious light of the years that are passed should be wholly forgotten in the electric glare of those which are to come; lest the music of purer ages should be altogether drowned in the wild shout of "forward, forward," and many beautiful things should be carelessly sacrificed to the bare notion of advance.

If woman's nature differs at all from man's, her education, her attainments and her aspirations should be different from his; yet the tendency of the present day is to force both sexes by similar means along the self-same groove.

Women vie with men in the higher branches of the exact sciences, and, as a matter of course, the victory is not always with the strong. But it is more than probable that these individual cases of success are achieved at a terribly disproportionate expense to the sex as a whole. A woman may indeed attain a high place in the mathematical tripos, but in the course of her three years of close and unremitting study, how many sweet visions of life's spring-time have been lost; in the pursuit of those mental gymnastics so appropriate to the male intellect, how many natural feminine faculties have been thwarted and crushed!

Where, indeed, the necessities of life demand that women should leave their natural sphere in order to share in the terrible struggle for existence, no word except of encouragement

should be spoken, but that such a spectacle should be regarded as other than a deplorable evil, is mere sentimental optimism.

It is difficult to exaggerate the harm which has already resulted from the so-called higher education of women. The earnest sincerity which formerly characterised all good women is gradually being replaced by a light, easy infidelity of high and noble things. The drawing-room conversation of women who have suffered most from this educational scourge, is seldom more than a series of cynical criticisms and grotesque perversions, which may sometimes be witty, but are always more or less antagonistic to the cause of truth. Old principles are despised, old landmarks are swept away; much that was "good" in the old days is branded now with the name "respectable," to be treated with ridicule; and thus by many surface sophisms, right is merged in wrong, and vice becomes little distinguishable from virtue.

The effects of this forced intellectual culture are most painfully apparent in our large metropolitan schools and the ladies' colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. No one, at least of the male sex, can help but be struck by the rareness of physical beauty among school-girls in the higher forms, and personal experience has conclusively demonstrated that Newnham and Girton possess few dangerous attractions for the average undergraduate.

When, as is often the case, we meet a young girl living in the midst of an uncongenial society, surrounded by savants and college dons, her brow perpetually contracted by unnatural thought, a strained weary expression in the eyes which might otherwise have sparkled with careless happiness, it is but small comfort to be told that she is learned in Greek roots, and the knowledge so acquired seems a poor compensation for the loss of girlhood's brightness and beauty.

But however much we may deprecate the present scheme of higher education for females, no one would dare for a moment to suggest that women should not be highly educated at all. The sphere of reason may indeed belong pre-eminently to man, but woman reigns supreme in the realm of the emotions, and this difference should be recognised as fundamental in the education of the two sexes. Leave logic and arithmetic and chemical analysis to the male portion of the community, for notwithstanding a few notorious successes and the rhetorical compliments of interested school-governors, the majority of women will do no more than demonstrate their own inferiority by competing with men in this arena.

It seems to me (for I do not wish to clothe my individual opinion with the authoritative plural) that the first and foremost object of a woman's higher education should be the correct development of her emotional faculties.

Let our young girls, when they have attained an easy knowledge of common things, devote their time to the expansion of those attributes which constitute them sweetly feminine. Let them read good, pure books of human interest, let them sing the glad world song with the poets, and learn the divine mysteries of art and nature.

It is reserved for maidens who have been bold enough, or fortunate enough, to abandon for this training the system of education which has all the authority of fashion on its side, to shed the purest, holiest light on this dark world of ours.

Such a maiden have I known, living a sweet simple life in a home of love and beauty. The birds and the flowers were her companions, her fair face reflected the purity which dwelt around her and within; her graceful flowing dress was innocent alike of Parisian deformity and æsthetic eccentricity, her gentle nature was unstrained by effort and untainted by the world.

How vividly do I remember the termination of my first visit at her home. She was waiting in the garden to say good-bye to me. All the lawn on which she stood was chequered with sunshine and leafy shade. Sunny gleams fell too upon her white muslin dress and upon her hair; but on me the shadows fell, and when I drew near to her a feeling of my great unworthiness stifled the passion which might else have struggled to my lips. I dared not look into those deep calm eyes of hers—I took her hand in mine for a moment, and murmured the word "good-bye." And as we stood there on the lawn, to me longing for her love, burning with a wild desire for the great gift of her heart—she gave a flower.

A long half year passed by before I saw her again, but during those months of absence I never failed to feel the soft influence of her goodness and simple maidenhood; and when at last the time of our meeting came, I realised that the emotion with which she had at first inspired me had deepened into the passionate adoration of a lifetime.

In the charm of her presence the light-footed hours sped all too quickly, and too soon dawned the day of our parting. It had been a hard winter, the wild north wind chanted a shrill saga among the leafless, frost-bitten branches, the snow lay deep on the lawn where we had stood six months ago to say good-bye, the garden was desolate, and the roses of the summer were long ago faded and dead. But my dear love was still beside me, and now my arm was thrown around her, her sweet head nestled against my breast, the tears of emotion trembled in her eyes—she could give me no flower this bitter winter day, but she gave me her heart instead, and in mine, not untouched before by a cynic frost, she has created an eternal summer.

BEATUS.