GIRLS AS STUDENTS.

By LILY WATSON.

"So much learning does not become a young woman!" The remark is worthy of a Mrs. Malaprop and yet would not fail entirely without an echo in the present day. Tom Stelling's progress of woman's education is not to everybody's taste, and many very desirable movements, which we unfortunately oppose, will disappear in time; but the thirst for knowledge will grow and will demand satisfaction.

We need look no further than the correspondence columns of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER for an illustration of the fascination of a student life, and the desirability of giving to all classes of opportunities of education.

We have constant inquiries as to the mode of entering Girton or Newnham, the possibility of a University degree, the way to qualify for one and another examination. Even those whose letters tell of only a Board School training plead for help. "My scanty school-days are past; I am ignorant; what can I do to know?" The cry is often pitiful, combined as it is with the tale of long hours of work for daily bread. The articles on Self-Culture were written to help girls eager for guidance, and many letters have borne witness to their usefulness. But how hard is the struggle for those who have not the opportunities of a liberal education! All honours to them for their effort and aspiration! Girls of an earlier generation had like considerations, but, in despair as to their satisfaction, these were not so often expressed. One girl I heard about, thirsting for classic lore, would go long at the Greek characters she could not understand, entangled in hopeless fascination. Rather a futile proceeding, my readers may fancy; why didn't she get a grammar and learn the alphabet? But to teach oneself Greek is not easy, and opportunities of learning it were scarce. Times have improved since then, and the Girl as Student has become a familiar character.

Tennyson's line about "Sweet girls graduate in their golden hair" awakened a sense of delicious incongruity when it appeared, and it used to be quoted by our fathers; but now I have observed that it causes a feeling of irritation rather than charm. The woman student who takes her life seriously has ceased to perceive anything extraordinary in being a "graduate," and resents as irrelevant the attention to golden hair and the adjective "sweet."

I hope, notwithstanding, that she will deserve it.

Girls who were nurtured on the Princesses and read Aurora Leigh were familiar with a certain mood of impassioned protest and self-abnegation against their intellectual degradation in the eyes of men; such protest now finds expression in the mouth of the "Princess," and of Mrs. Browning's heroine. Poor Maggie Tulliver also! Who does not recall Heart-sinking at the appeal of her brother Tom after she had helped him with his Latin?

"Mr. Stelling," said Maggie that same evening when they were in the drawing-room, "I couldn't do Euclid and all Tom's lessons if you were to teach me instead of him?"

"No, you couldn't!" said Tom indignantly. "Girls can't do Euclid; can they, sir?"

"They can pick up a little of everything, I dare say," said the doctors. They're a great deal of superficial cleverness, but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow."

"Tom, delighted with this verdict, telegraphed his triumph by wagging his head at Maggie behind Mr. Stelling's chair."

Generalizations like that of the Rev. Mr. Stelling promote envious speculation of one who is now acknowledged to be ridiculous.

There are superficial students, however, of both sexes, and we see to look at certain types of "Girls as Students," the superficial type shall come first.

Not by virtue of her sex is this young lady, whom we describe as superficial, but by reason of a certain habit of mind, with perhaps lack of proper training. She must have been a not unusual figure in the days of our grandmothers—she is a sampler, wax flowers, and backboard—when women's education was perhaps as bad as it could be. (In thinking of the progress of woman's education as uniformly onward, we forget Lady Jane Grey!) A "smattering" (expressive word) is all that this pupil retains, and she shows it sufficiently. She has not said to herself, in the words of the terrible and delightful Kleser: "I must know this exactly; I must understand this exactly; I must do this exactly."

She may have a gift of displaying scraps of information in such a way as to suggest immense riches beyond. Even so do company promoters exhibit specimens of ore from the mouth of a mine! In study, her one aim is to catch up sufficient from her books to deceive the teachers into the impression she knows something about the subject next to nothing. Otherwise, she is vague and indifferent, and goes by routine. In her childhood she is required to learn by rote. Three sums about the number of men in it will take to plough a field in a given time; and she reduces the answer to farthings. When she grows older she does it "with the nicest possible accuracy on the surface of what she has to learn; showy accomplishments she prefers. If she plays the piano, she chooses what is easy, effective, and brilliant; any suggestion as to the theory of music she repudiates at once. If she is sent abroad, she learns to chatter French and German after a fashion; but how slovenly and incorrect is her performance! With German declensions and French idioms and irregular verbs she troubles not at all, and every sentence jars painfully on the ear of the one to whom she speaks, even if she can contrive to make herself understood. She has never had to heart the old-fashioned saying, "Whiteness is not worth doing well." Perhaps it is a misnomer to call her a "student." Yet she is often possessed of quickness of intelligence, and if she would only mend her ways, and learn patience and modesty, she might do well.

In strong contrast with this type of girl comes the one who makes the acquisition of knowledge. We have all seen and pitted her at school; the pupil whose memory takes her receive and retain with quickness, who does not at one moment see through a difficult point, who needs more explanation than her companions, and is consequently often placed at a disadvantage. Let her take heart! What she doesn't know she will probably be able to preserve. And the very slowness and dullness that distress her in one form, she'll improve in time; her intellect by-and-by, after constant practice, will be able to discern in flashes. I have seen, side by side, a slow, earnest student and a quick, superficial to the long run, the slow girl came out triumphantly ahead of the other.

The third type of student shall be called, for want of a better name, "millitarist." She asks herself how much of such and such a piece of knowledge. She is always going up for examinations, and in preparing for them she rejects with horror any valuable information a little off the track of the examiner. "Oh, I shall not be asked that!" she exclaims with decision, no matter how interesting or important may be the matter in question. To get through examinations, this, in her opinion, is the whole end of education; and she regards that as the end which should be only the means. Perhaps it is not entirely her fault; but this suggestion opens a field too vast to enter upon at present.

The fourth type of student is one very common among girls of to-day. The modern thirst for knowledge, the opportunities of study, all combine to make her what she is; the eager student who overworks. She has not—and, being young, this is not wonderful—a sense of the due fitness and proportion of life. She loves study; she is intensely anxious to learn as much as she can, and she flies to the ministry of an enthusiasm that leads her to neglect exercise and recreation, sometimes with the most disastrous results. It is of little use to come to other authors to other authors to other authors, for the world is not made for reading. I have heard, and everyone must have heard, of eager girl-students who have utterly broken down simply through excessive strain.

Personally, I regard with horror the ways of High-school girls and others who study up till the last lock and key, or even later. I hear from one and another of this way of living, and consider it in the highest degree improper. Why not grant evening rest to young students as well as to others?" Oh, but there is not time for all the subjects that have to be got in!"

Then leave them out. But there is time, and ample time, for a liberal education.

Parents ought to set their faces rigidly against such excessive evening lessons. Study assiduous study, during the day, with proper intervals for meals and exercise, is right enough; but, carried on into the hours when mind and body must be more or less weary and in need of relaxation, it is absurd and objectionable. I have myself talked with High-school mistresses on the subject, and found that in many cases the upholders of the system were the parents, who felt they were not having their money's worth unless their daughter "looked" every possible subject in the curriculum.

As I write these lines, my thoughts stray into the past, and there rise before me the visions of a city, amid amidst! While I am midwinter upon a rocky height, a moderate broadening of my eye, and the sea washing its utmost boundaries. The streets are full of boys, young and old; girls, not alone the prophetess, but the city of education. High above the valley of a stream, in a vast circle of houses or
"Place" around a garden, stands an "Institution," the Scotch term for the school, where girls, of every age from seven to twenty-one, come and go. Classes in the airy, lofty, echoing rooms succeed one another all the school-day. Each subject is undertaken by some master who is a specialist in that subject; and what inspiring classes they are! Alfred Haefl for French, Dr. Lenman for Italian—the list is long and honourable. The students are eager, zealous, interested, and the day passes almost too quickly. Then away go the schoolgirls about four o'clock; the English strangers wander their way to their pleasant foster-home. Dinner in the early evening is a merry, jovial meal, where the experiences of the day are talked over. There are gaps here and there in the intervals of classes which have been utilised for preparation or practice, but a little more time may be needed after dinner. Before eight o'clock everything in the way of study is over, and a pleasant time of work and story-reading follows. Saturday is a holiday spent in mountain rambles, excursions to places famed in song and story, walks to seashore or wooded hill. The life is healthful, delightful, and there is never a suggestion of weariness or over-pressure. Yet here are some things that cause good results: French, German, Italian, Latin, English literature and language, drawing, singing, the piano, arithmetic, history, some branch of natural science—the list reads too much like a school prospectus, and I will stop. Alas! as I look upon the picture it fades away; the Institution is no more, the professors are gone or scattered, and their English pupil who was so happy is a woman of mature age, wishing the girls for whom she writes could have as much enjoyment as she enjoyed in the days of long ago.

I began this reminiscence in the hope of emphasising my objection to work and stress for pupils, and before leaving the subject of the overworking student I may say that any study of Art, from its very fascination, tempts its votaries to excess. In that clever story A Splendid Cousin, by Mrs. Andrew Dean, Theodora exults when she sees her way to two extra hours of violin practice from 11.30 to 1.30. This is hardly over-drawn. Hour after hour the ambitious girl pianist or violinist toils away; five hours, six hours, seven hours, are all too short—say, the whole day. Then at last the overstrained cord snaps. Violinist's cramp or nervous exhaustion claims the student, and Nature asserts her rights. Girls, in the interests of health, beauty, of Art itself, avoid over-pressure.

This advice is not necessary for the fifth type of student—the girl who works in sports. She takes up a subject with zeal, does excellently in it, then flags and lets her interest die away. She causes great disappointment to her teachers and it is unnecessary to insist on the fact that she can hope to accomplish but little. Slow patient plodder is far ahead of her.

Another advice, and that is to belong to your teachers and an enemy to herself, is she who is conceited. The reproach of arrogance was once frequently levelled at women who 'went in' for higher education; perhaps with some justice. But humility is the only fitting result of real culture. She who is inclined to take herself too seriously and parade herself on her knowledge has gone only a very little way on the path that leads to wisdom.

"The mere shall inherit the earth," is a saying that every student should ponder. It means far more than is perceived on the surface. They only who are willing to submit their mind to a mind above theirs, to subdue their individual pride of intellect, can enter upon the heritage of the best thought of the world.

The vain, self-satisfied student whose attention is occupied in criticising her teacher, who imagines she knows best, who wants herself on the little knowledge she has acquired, and is always ready to "show off" that moderate possession—beware of such a person. The next lesson must be this—she is too superficial, the slow, the utilitarian, the over-seasman, the casual, the conceited—I might paint a charming portrait of the ideal student. Something she has in her nature of the second and fourth types we have sketched, it is true, but she is bright and quick as well as diligent and persevering, reasonable and well-balanced as well as eager. Modest she is, womanly, and receptive; it is a delight to teach her.

After all, education is a business of the soul. Never let any of my readers be induced to use the phrase "When I have finished my education". Education is never finished. Happy is she who can enjoy, after a long time, to turn an arid and useless system of instruction into the living and fruitful, the bitter essences into the well-tempered, system, "breaking." All the freedom the young wild creature had rejoiced in was to be utterly taken away. Hardly the beginning of a prison sentence over the grave of one of the wisest of men: "He died learning."

CHAMPION'S FRIEND.

"There, there, have done, boy," he said firmly, but not unkindly. "What good would you be? You should like to know, with a great, powerful brute like that? I can't have the colt spoiled by being played with. He ought to make a valuable hunter some day."

Tears of acute disappointment rose to Larrie's brown eyes, but he blinked them away again, and summoned up courage to urge his plea once more.

"Champion is so full of spirit, father. If Eastman puts him straight into the plough, I think he will go until wild. It must be so hard for the delicate animal."

But Farmer Norther had come to the end of his patience.

"Nonsense, boy. Do you want to teach Eastman his business? There, be off indoors and get your supper, and mind, I won't have the colt meddled with—you understand? And the child slipped away up to his little attic bedroom, to hide the rush of tears which almost blinded him. It had needed every grain of moral courage he possessed to face his stern master with this request, and in spite of all it had been denied him.

"Poor, poor Champion," he sobbed, almost wringing his hands. "I could only have helped him. And Eastman is so hard.

"Poor, little, motherless lamb, living his lonely life without any tokens of affection to brighten his former cold days. He was a heart, too, so bountiful of feeling, a heart that must of necessity pour forth its love and unselfish devotion on others. So, finding no sympathy or rest of any kind, he had turned with passionate yearning to the dumb creatures around him, lavishing upon them the richness of his love. They became to him such dear friends. The dignified old watch-dog, the placid cows, the gentle, patient sheep—they were exceeding dear and precious in his sight.

But best of all he had loved Champion, the great rough colt. For he would follow the child about like a dog, thrusting his nose everywhere into the manger and whimpering with restless regret when his little companion bade him farewell for the night. And now this true and loving friend was to be turned into a plough animal, and Champion's imprisonment must be his fate, till death should bring release. Was not this hard enough? Why should the bright free nature be tortured by harshness and fear? Alas, alas, he was powerless to help. And the child felt impotent tears of passionate sorrow for the pain he could not prevent. He knew the tender mercies of Eastman only too well, and he dreaded the morrow uneasely.

Below, in the old-fashioned parlour, the farmer smoked his pipe reflectively. He was not a very intelligent man, but he was observant and more intellectual by nature than most of his class. Still, Larrie was to him an enigma. He was far from the small boy in his reserved hard way, and was ambitious too for his future. Nevertheless his only son was in many ways a disappointment to him. He was so unlike other boys, he rejected all the lessons and training that even the sternest father could impose on the face and figure of a girl. If only his mother had lived, she would have understood the lad and managed him better—and was it not perhaps that Farmer Norther was one who died before one short year of happy married life.

After all though, he reminded himself, Larrie was yet but a small lad when he was but six years old, and he could not expect much of a child only ten years old. When he grew up things would be different.