

# INGALLS' HOME MAGAZINE.

Vol. I

LYNN, MASS., SEPTEMBER, 1888.

No. 11.

## AMERICAN WOMEN.

BY AN ENGLISHWOMAN.

**B**OTH in England and in America there are numbers of women who have had no systematic training in youth, have never learned a single thing thoroughly, who have, perhaps, small mental power, yet who, through adverse circumstances, are thrown on their own resources, and have to maintain themselves. Such women are to be pitied, and their parents are to be blamed. Riches, even the greatest fortunes, do sometimes make for themselves wings, but that middle-class girls may some time in the course of their lives have to earn their own bread is an idea that seldom seems to enter the head of middle-class parents. But the American woman has not the double misery to contend against that her English sister has. Wealth is as powerful, and as much sought after, in the States as in the United Kingdom; but one erroneous, baneful opinion concerning it does not exist to the same extent. So long as the opinion exists in England that the only standard by which men and women are to be adjudged worthy is the standard of wealth, so long will English women in reduced circumstances have a harder lot than American women similarly situated. This baneful opinion does exist in England as it exists nowhere else in the world, one result of the enormous and rapid development of wealth and mistaken teachings of parents, especially some of those belonging to the middle-class.

Before saying anything about the avenues of employment open to educated women in America, it may not be amiss to compare the position of English and American women. All over America women enjoy an amount of consideration which strikes everyone, and which they do not enjoy to the same extent in England. This is especially true of the

lower and lower-middle classes. How often the English workman looks upon his wife as a sort of slave; how rarely the American workman does so. How often the English workman answers for his sin in this respect before a magistrate; how exceptional is a similar case in America. It was John Stuart Mill who gave it as his opinion that "the subordination of one sex to the other was wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side or disability on the other." Time has shown that John Stuart Mill was right. The tendency in England, so far as women are concerned, is admitted to be a "levelling-up" tendency, but Englishmen are far behind their American brethren in this respect. Both socially and legally women occupy a higher position in both the United States and Canada than they do in England. Those among them who are compelled to earn their own livelihood, those who have met with adverse fortune, and from leaders in society have become dependents upon it, have not the same buffets to contend against or the same coldness shown them as their sisters in similar circumstances have in England. The writer is well aware that the conditions of society in the New World are different to what they are in the Old, but this is no adequate reason for the greater respect shown to women in the one place than in the other. In the western portions of the American continent women are comparatively few; in some communities, such as Salem and Lowell, Massachusetts, they outnumber the men by five or six to one, and yet their great preponderance in the New England States

does not lessen the respect and consideration shown them by men. Perhaps the greater respect shown to women in America and Canada is due to the women themselves. They are certainly not more ladylike than English girls, but the writer believes they are more inflexibly obstinate, and look for and demand a homage which would be abhorrent to an English girl. The average girl in the new world knows perfectly well how to take care of herself, and rather prides herself on the possession of a stiff neck instead of a manageable spine. If her moral courage is not greater than that of her English sister, her independent will certainly is, and, having made up her mind and put her foot down, it is no trifle will make her budge. The phrase "bread and butter miss," which one hears in England, is never heard in America. There may be nothing very grand in this female tenacity—nothing heroic—and men may prefer that gentle pliability and timidity which they expect to find in women; but in the battle of life—the battle for existence—it is the bending, weak, and supple who go to the wall.

The education of women in America is far more utilitarian in character than is the education of women in England. It is surprising that this should be the case when it is borne in mind that one of the results of English modern forms of life is, that there are far more marriageable women than men, and that, polygamy being out of the question, many women will never attain their ideal, and will consequently have to labor and earn their daily bread. What appears to be the aim and end of a girl's boarding-school education in England? Simply marriage, and how to become most attractive with a view to promote marriage.

There are many situations in life which unmarried women can usefully fill, yet how little they have been educated to fill them. Adverse fortune comes, the unforeseen and the unexpected happen, the most rigid economy has to be exercised, and the girls in the family find themselves compelled, without any previous training or experience, to shift for themselves. The American young lady is not handicapped in a similar manner. Her tastes and her habits may in many cases be such as could be dispensed with, but, compared with her English cousin, she is far

better adapted by experience and education to fight her own battles. She may dress more "loudly" than the English lady, may have a liking for chewing gum, and may be fond of pickles between meals; she may address young men by their Christian names before she has known them a week; but with all her eccentricities, sent to the public schools of America at an early age, where she meets all sorts and conditions of young people, she acquires a practical knowledge unknown to girls of her own station of life in England. Precociousness may not be a thing to admire, and a little of it satisfies. Many American girls would be more lovable if they possessed less of it, but when stern necessity drives and a young woman has to do what she never expected to do, and has to face a cold, harsh world, precociousness is better than timidity.

Both in England and America there are two kinds of young ladies to meet in society. There is the girl born with a gift for system and administration, unselfish, industrious, quick to learn, or, as they say in America, "smart." There is the other girl who is sometimes slangy, generally careless, frivolous, and dressy. It is the former of these two types of young lady who feels the altered circumstances of life the more keenly. The latter may or may not lose her womanly refinement and attributes amid lowered surroundings. The former never will. No matter how bitter the task, how coarse her companions, how hard her toil, she will bravely struggle on, retaining as brightly as ever all that makes woman lovable. Surely such women are too good to be cast upon the world totally unprepared to meet what may possibly be the experience of all. Previous training can do much to ameliorate a condition which, unhappily, is the lot of many, but which training is greatly neglected in England. And this is the more surprising when the fact is remembered that a very large number of women seem to have roused themselves, and are willing to apply themselves heart and soul to all studies that may be set before them, and are open to them. In America, as well as in England, a great movement is going on among women for the amelioration of the condition of women. It is to be hoped that it will continue in ever-widening circles until all women are brought under its influence.