

It has been and is still often objected that unusual mental powers and a high degree of intellectual culture in woman unfit her for the commoner uses of every day and domestic life. How was it in the case of the Brontës?

When Southey from the heights of his masculine supremacy wrote to Charlotte:—"The day-dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind, and in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else," he showed himself profoundly ignorant of the mind and habits of the woman whom he addressed.

Never was there a woman whose intellect from first to last was more entirely the servant of her reason, her conscience, her sense of duty. And the same may be said of Emily and Anne, from childhood; and remember that these girls had made considerable progress in their literary attempts at an age when most children have no thought beyond their dolls and play—up to that later period when the "possession" was strong upon Charlotte, urging, impelling, *goad*ing her to write, when her fame was assured by the publication of "Jane Eyre," and impatient publishers were restless under delay—we never find her neglecting for a single hour the *res augusta domi*, the narrow things of home. These had the first place in her well-regulated mind, the first claim to her faithful service.

There was much anxiety, much wearisome effort, much painful solicitude, much silent renunciation of long-cherished hopes for love or duty's sake, in the life of each one of the sisters; but prominently in that of Charlotte. As the eldest of the three surviving she felt herself to Emily and Anne almost in the relation of a mother, and her love for them had all the mother's

watchful tenderness and anxiety. Yet there was but the difference of a year and a half between her age and that of Emily. These women with their extraordinary mental gifts, were girls, "taught by their father as theoretically, and by their aunt practically, that to take an active part in all household work, was, in their position, woman's simple duty;" "but," adds their biographer, "in their careful employment of time they found many an odd five minutes for reading while watching the cakes, and managed the union of two kinds of employment better than King Alfred."

Charlotte writing to a friend describes herself as having lately discovered that she has "quite a talent for cleaning, sweeping up hearths, dusting rooms, making beds, &c.," and adds facetiously, "so if everything else fails I can turn my hand to that, if any one will give me good wages for little labor;" while Emily, that "remnant of the Titans," of whom M. Hégér says: "She should have been a man—a great navigator. Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old, and her strong, imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition, never have given way but with life"—"when at home," we are told, "took the principal part of the cooking upon herself, and did all the household ironing; and after Tabby* grew old and infirm, it was Emily who made all the bread for the family; and any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her studying German out of an open book, propped up before her as she kneaded the dough;"—"but," adds the narrator, "no study, however interesting, interfered with the goodness of the bread, which was always light and excellent." †

"It was the household custom among

*The old servant.

†Mrs. Gaskell.