

upon them, and this habit of concentrating them on the work of the moment has been practised by the successful men of all ages and professions. One of our most successful brewers was in the habit of stating, "I could brew one hour, do mathematics the next and shoot the next, and each with my whole soul." And the great Napoleon said: "My mind is like a chest of drawers. When I have done with one subject I shut it up, thus I have no confusion of ideas." And thus the work of the moment entirely occupied his thoughts, and he was able to attend to every detail of his duties separately. It is said that he even noticed the buttons on his soldiers' uniforms. He found time for everything because he gave his thoughts to one thing at a time, and he reached the highest pinnacle of success that has been reached by modern man.

Now we cannot hide from ourselves that the civilisation and education of the present day have a tendency to disorganise and scatter our thoughts in spite of the boundless blessings they shed on us. They create such varied interests, such numberless occupations, that when we are doing one thing we are haunted by the next thing that has to be done and our ideas become confused. Woman's work specially seems subject to this irksomeness and want of rest. Men have professions to which to devote themselves, and if circumstances exempt them from following professions, they can concentrate their energies undisturbed on some one subject which appeals to their intelligence and wisdom, and which requires all the efforts of their mind to master. But we women are different. Our duties are often trivial, and are always liable to interruptions, and we scramble through them as quickly as we can, so as to be free for more congenial occupations. And the reading of the present day encourages the same slack desultory habit of mind. Our books and newspapers are so numerous that in our eagerness to peruse them all, we skim and skip a great part of their contents. Then we wonder that our daily duties have such feeble results, and that our reading is so soon forgotten. But is all this to be wondered at? Can any good solid work or good solid reading be effected without application of the heart and mind, in other words without concentration of thought?

No, the law by the sweat of his brow man must earn his bread has reference to his higher as well as to his lower nature, and by the exertion of his mind he must fulfil his duties and earn his knowledge. The most homely duties require concentration of thought for their fulfilment, just as the most trifling knowledge requires it for its attainment. Ah, that tree of knowledge! It presents itself to us as it did to our first mother Eve six thousand years ago, as pleasant to the eyes, and as a tree to be desired to make us wise, but if we think as she did, that we have merely to stretch out our hand and take and eat of it, to be nourished by its divine fruit, we shall find as she did, that it will be a curse to us instead of a blessing; but if we follow Nature's will concerning it, and concentrate our thoughts on the acquirement even of its humblest branches, we shall reap the fruit of our labours, and it will shed upon us unbounded blessings.

My young friends, as your lives will be so specially exposed to the temptation of wandering thoughts, let me urge upon you, now that you are standing on life's threshold, to use means which will prevent your indulging in them. Concentration of thought, as I said before, is a matter of individual will, but like all actions physical or mental, each time it is put into practice the inclination to repeat it is strengthened, and I would suggest three rules for its regular practice which, if you follow, will unconsciously to yourselves weave it into your life and habits:—

1. Never try to do two things at a time either of which require any effort of mind. From the mind's inability to contain simultaneous thoughts, simultaneous employments create a zig-zag confusion of ideas which is fatal to their advancement. There are some occupations, such as sewing or knitting, etc., which, although they cannot be learned in the first instance without a mental effort, can, by constant repetition be performed so mechanically that while the fingers are occupied with them, the mind may be free for some totally irrelative effort; but even in their case, both pursuits would probably have more satisfactory results by being followed singly.

2. Set yourself a task for a certain time every day which necessitates concentration of thought, and choose the time and place

to work at it where you are least likely to be disturbed by outward influences. The task should be something congenial to your tastes so that your heart as well as your mind may be in it. It may be learning a few lines from a favourite poet by heart, or reading a passage from a favourite author and putting it into your own words from memory, or contemplating some subject in all its different lights, until you can form and write down your ideas on it, but let your task be something definite, something which necessitates results which will test whether you have exercised concentration of thought or no. Before beginning it you should see that any outside helps you may require, such as pens, paper, books of reference, etc., are ready and handy for use, so that the search for them may not distract your thoughts once you have started upon your work.

3. If, when you are engaged in any study, you find your thoughts beginning to wander, retrace your study from where they began to wander, and go over it again with your mind fixed on it. The irksomeness of having to repeat your work will put you on your guard against wandering thoughts. They will soon forego their attacks upon you, and you will feel your mind invigorated by the effort you have made to resist them.

These three rules are simple and easy to follow, and only need a little resolution on your part to be put into daily practice. If riches or renown were their promised reward, which of you would not submit cheerfully to the discipline they involve? But they will bring you a greater prize than riches or renown, for they will help you to acquire a perpetual capacity for happiness over which circumstances can have no control. In your prosperity, a steady and systematic concentration of thought on some lofty subject will gladden you with a calm enjoyment, and will strengthen your character against the enervating influence of fortune's smiles, and in your adversity, in those hours of sorrow and anxiety which sometimes shadow the brightest of lives, the undivided application of your mental faculties on some one study, will be like "balm to your hurt mind," and will enable you to bear your sorrow with a resigned spirit, and to come to a wise decision on the subject of your anxiety.

"IF LOVING HEARTS WERE NEVER LONELY—";

OR,

MADGE HARCOURT'S DESOLATION.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORM BURSTS.

MRS. HARCOURT looked up uneasily.

She did not regret her action, but she could not forget the expression on her step-daughter's face when she left the breakfast table, so she prepared for a storm. She little knew how much mischief had been done.

Helen was to her but as any other child in the village, and Madge's constant and lengthened visits to her had ever been a grievance.

She intended to meet the girl's indignation with a high hand and assert her authority, but when she looked up and met Madge's stony dark eyes, she was rather taken aback, and turned her head away.

Madge advanced to the table, and

leaning one hand heavily upon it, said, in a voice of stifled indignation—

"I suppose you have heard what happened last night?"

"I have heard that Helen Liston is dead," replied her step-mother coldly, "but I really don't know why you should look so tragic over it. The poor child had been dying for months, and now it is a merciful release."

"Tragic," repeated Madge, with a slight sneer. "Yes, that is a good word for it: but since you know that Helen is dead I need not speak of her. It is of ourselves I want to speak. What has happened affects you and me materially. No, do not interrupt me," she continued quickly as Mrs. Harcourt was about to speak. "I won't keep you long, it is better to come to the point at once. For months past your conduct

to me has been goading in the extreme. You have treated me always as if I were a child, and for Jack's and father's sake, I have tried to put up with it, but now I tell you I won't stand it any longer. I was sent for to my friend when she was dying, and no matter who or what she was, you had no right to keep back my message. You left me in ignorance and made me break a sacred promise. I cannot forget, I never shall. After this any pretence of love between us would be too utterly ridiculous. You go your way and I will go mine. I absolutely refuse to obey you any longer."

While Madge, in a quick, but distinct voice, spoke these words, Mrs. Harcourt's anger rose rapidly, and the instant her step-daughter paused, she stood up and confronted her.