

In no respect is the influence of women more important than in religion. Much might be said of the obstacles placed in the way of religious progress by the crude and dogmatic prepossessions of ignorant women, who will rush in with confident assertion where angels might fear to tread; but this is neither the time nor the place for such remarks. It is enough to remind you that in no part of your life do you more need the width and modesty and courage of thought, and the delicacy of insight given by culture, than when you are facing the grave religious questions of the day, either for yourself or others.

But let me turn to a somewhat less serious subject. We earnestly desire that women should be highly educated. And yet is there not a type of educated woman which we do not wholly admire? I am not going to caricature a bluestocking, but to point out one or two real dangers. Education is good; but perfect sanity is better still. Sanity is the most excellent of all women's excellencies. We forgive eccentricity and oneness—the want of perfect sanity—in men, and especially men of genius; and we rather reluctantly forgive it in women of genius; but in ordinary folk, no. These are the strong-minded women—ordinary folk, who make a vigorous protest against one or two of the minor mistakes of society, instead of lifting the whole. I should call these women of imperfect sanity. It is a small matter that you should protest against some small maladjustment or folly; but it is a great matter that you should be perfectly sane and well-balanced. Now education helps sanity. It shows the proportion of things. An American essayist bids us “keep our eyes on the fixed stars.” Education helps us to do this. It helps us to live the life we have to lead on a higher mental and spiritual level—it glorifies the actual.

And now, seeing these things are so, what ought to be the attitude of educated girls and women toward pleasures, the usual pleasures of society? Certainly not the cynical one—“Life would be tolerable if it were not for its pleasures.” Pleasures do make up, and ought to make up, a considerable portion of life. Now I have no time for any essay on pleasures. I will only offer two remarks. One is that the pleasure open to all cultivated women, even in the pleasures that please them least, is the pleasure of giving pleasure. Go to give pleasure, not to get it, and that converts anything into a pleasure. The other remark is, Pitch your ordinary level of life on so quiet a note that simple things shall not fail to please. If home, and children, and games, and the daily routine of life—if the sight of October woods and the Severn sea, and of human happy faces fail to please, then either in fact or in imagination you are drugging yourself with some strong drink of excitement, and spoiling the natural healthy appetite for simple pleasures. This is one of the dangers of educated women; but it is their danger because they are imperfectly educated—educated on one side, that of books, and not on the other and greater of wide human sympathies. Society seems to be burden and narrow and dull the uneducated woman, but it also hardens and dulls a certain sort of educated woman too, one who refuses her sympathies to the pleasures of life. But to the fuller nature society brings width and fresh clearness. It gives the larger heart and the readier sympathy, and the wider the sphere the more does such a nature expand to fill it.

What I am now saying amounts to this, that an educated intelligence is good, but an educated sympathy is better. I recall certain lines written by the late Lord Carlisle on being told that a lady was plain and commonplace:—