

Portfolio of Select Literature.

THOUGHTS ON EMPLOYMENT FOR UNMARRIED WOMEN.

In the annals of medicine, one notices that there is generally some prevalent malady or other which, for the time especially occupies the imagination of the Faculty, so that any anomalous case is likely to be referred to it. Some years ago, it was liver complaint; now it is disease of the heart. It will be something else by and by. And no doubt all these complaints do put on an epidemic character; the widely-spread cause has wide-spread results. But the cleverest practitioner will probably lay more mischiefs at the door of the disease of the day than it is really accountable for. And I suspect that, in the same way, there is rather too exclusive a tendency to refer all the unhappiness among girls and women to one and the same cause, want of occupation. Yet no one can doubt that it is at present an evil which produces a greatly-increased amount of conscious suffering.

I am no friend to schools; on the contrary, I am rather bigoted to home education. Wherever the parents have one heart and mind (better anything, than that the young girl witness the squabble or the stratagem, become the partisan of father or mother), wherever the young life can develop freely in the house, and a fair amount of systematic teaching be secured there, surely she is in the safest place. I never see a file of girls, after their formal walk, re-entering the prison gates of some staring, stuccoed house with pretentious name, in the precincts of one of our large towns without a suspicion that the advantage of the best masters which congregate them there but poorly makes up for the dangers of so artificial a life. But school days are generally looked back upon as happy. They are too regular and too busy to be otherwise. This is their strong point. What the girls acquire may not be worth much, but the trouble of acquiring it has kept off all sense of purposelessness. There is no spare time to hang heavy, no listless indecision as to what had better be done next. Every hour brings its allotted task, and the young spirits are bright with the dignity and complacency that comes from being thoroughly employed.

Nor indeed is it often in the first years of home life, when so-called education is recently over, that girls know much of this great want we are thinking about. A bright future plays before their imagination; small events take up a large space in the mind; amusements are energetic; life excitingly full of possibilities. And yet, even in these early days, we have seen sisters who loved each other and loved their parents, less happy together than apart, just because when both were at home there was less necessary occupation for either. They trenched upon each other's undefined province; ran both, as it were, on the same line; and so there came little jealousies, little collisions, little fits of alienation, each wondering why the other was so hard to live with, and the mother afraid of some inherent incompatibility between her girls' tempers; and all the time it was only because there was not enough for the two to do. Later, one of these girls took to drawing, for which she had a decided talent, with a quite professional earnestness, leaving to the other a more exclusive domestic sphere;