

LADIES' CORNER.

—EDITORS:—

MISSES ANNIE G. CAMPBELL, JESSIE CONNELL, LAURA BENNETT.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

WE take from *The Week* the following interesting paper, read at the Dominion W. C. T. U., by Agnes Maule Machar:

The differences of opinion that have complicated the question of the Higher Education of Women recall the remark of a thoughtful writer, that in the actual condition of humanity, errors and misconceptions are the natural accompaniments of the process through which truth is brought to light. To this general truth, the question of the Higher Education of Women forms no exception; and perhaps the cause has suffered from the mistakes of its friends, scarcely less than from those of its enemies. The main struggle, however, has been fought, and even it is now generally conceded that there is no reason why studious young women should not have free access to all the advantages of systematic and thorough training that are open to studious young men.

There are still some who, either from misconception or from a strange and slowly dying prejudice against a thoroughly educated womanhood, would fain keep back the wheels of time. Even literary women have been found ready to sound the note of alarm that the progress of female education is likely to prove injurious to the race by deteriorating the physical health and development of the mothers of the future.

There can be no doubt that this is not altogether a superfluous warning, in regard to the conduct of education for both sexes under the present general "cramming system," which pervades all our educational institutions, and has called forth such a vigorous protest from English men of letters. Doubtless, also, the evil effects of the system are likely to tell much more injuriously on young women than on young men, but, this is merely an accident of education, not its necessary or legitimate accompaniment; and we may trust that, ere long, the growing intelligence of the age will sweep away a practice so injurious to the true development, whether mental or physical, which is the aim of education, properly so-called.

All true friends of the progress of higher education among women have a double reason for urging on this urgently needed reform.

But one distinction cannot be too strongly emphasized, in all discussions of this question; and that is, the distinction between "Liberal" and "Specialised" education. These two stand on entirely different grounds, and, in discussion, should be kept entirely distinct, especially as regards the education of women.

For, as regards men, the specialised education, that is, the education which fits him for a special calling in life, follows naturally in the wake of the liberal education which should precede it, whenever this is possible, while, in the case of women, the domestic duties which form the usual and normal avocations of the most happily situated women do not seem to have the same direct connection with previous linguistic, mathematic or scientific study.

As regards women, the specialised studies which naturally follow the college course of the young man are only for the comparatively few; those who combine, with the need and the desire to earn their own livelihood, the ability and the inclination for some professional calling. These of course have a right to the best specialised training possible to fit them for their chosen vocation; and as the great excess of women over men makes it inevitable that many women must remain unmarried, and in most cases maintain themselves, it is only to be expected that many more intelligent and independent young women will seek to provide themselves in advance with the means of earning an honourable competence, should a congenial marriage not fall naturally to their lot.

As for the somewhat overstrained fears of those who dread that the tendency to seek specialised training may deteriorate the physical health and development of women we may well reply that, if it does tend to lower the ideal *physique*, in some cases, this is not an ideal world and we have frequently to adapt ourselves to very un-ideal conditions. If every woman could be fitted into a safe domestic niche—

Her office there to rear, to teach,

Becoming, as is meet and fit

A link among the days, to knit

The generations each to each—

it would certainly be quite unnecessary that she should exhaust any portion of her strength and energy in undergoing a severe course of specialized study. But as labour of some kind must need be the lot of many women who frequently have not only to maintain themselves but to provide for others, helplessly dependent on them, and as it is better, after all, that women should "work" than they should "weep," or even idle, it becomes a matter of some consequence whether they shall do congenial and remunerative work or earn a bare livelihood by ill paid drudgery. And the severest course of study necessary for professional training is scarcely likely to exhaust the strength and vitality of women as much as must the hard menial labour, or the perpetual machine-work, at which so many mothers of families prematurely wear themselves out in too prolonged hours of manual drudgery. The dangers to physical health that lurk in specialized study are after all but a drop in the bucket compared to the manifest evil effects of the overstrain of physical labour to which many women are driven by hard necessity. And of course, for any individual, the greatest happiness and usefulness are to be found in the line of those natural gifts and promptings, which, for all of us, are at least indications of the kind of work that God means us to do in this world.

It would seem, therefore, unjust to deny to any young woman who should desire to prepare herself for some professional avocation, the means of so doing.

In the case of her marriage, the acquirements will not be entirely thrown away—no real knowledge ever is wasted, while the mental discipline they have involved, the habits of accuracy and thoroughness gained, will be most useful to her in the conduct of her household and the training of her children. Only in very exceptional instances, indeed, would she be at all likely to attempt to live the double life—professional and domestic—which