

THOUGHTS

ON THE

HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

The ancient stoics, who derived much of their philosophy from Egypt and the East, believed in a series of great cosmical periods, at the end of each of which the world and all things therein were burned by fire, but only to re-appear in the succeeding age on so precisely the same plan that one of these philosophers is reported to have held that in each succeeding cycle there would be a new Xantippe to scold a new Socrates. I have sometimes thought that this illustration expressed not merely their idea of cosmical revolutions, but also the irrepressible and ever recurring conflict of the rights and education of women. Notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, I believe that Xantippe was as good a wife as Socrates or any of his contemporary Greeks deserved. She no doubt kept his house in order, prepared his dinners, and attended to his collars and buttons if he used such things, and probably had a general love and respect for the good man. But she was quite incapable of seeing any sense or reason in his philosophy; and must have regarded it as a vexatious waste of time, and possibly as a chronic source of impecuniosity in family affairs. The educated Greek of her day had small respect for woman, and no idea of any other mission for her than that of being his domestic drudge. No one had ever taught Xantippe philosophy. Hence she despised it; and being a woman of character and energy, she made herself felt as a thorn in the flesh of her husband and his associates. In this way Xantippe derived from her husband's wisdom only a provocation of her bad temper, and he lost all the benefit of the loving sympathy of a kindred soul; and so the best and purest of heathen philosophers found no help-meet for him.

Xantippe thus becomes a specimen of the typical uneducated woman in her relation to the higher departments of learning and human progress.