

but her parents will not hear of a daughter of theirs being a doctor; it is altogether far too new and extraordinary an idea, and she must (as she thinks) fritter her life away at home in calls and letter-writing and dress and trivialities. Another has had from childhood dreams of being an author. She writes from her inmost heart, and sends her poems and articles, polished with loving care, to one editor after another, but back they unavailingly come "declined with thanks." A third was going to Newnham or Girton, but her brother runs into debt, so it cannot be afforded. A fourth is entering the teaching profession with bright hopes, but her health breaks down, and it is all over. One might multiply such cases without end. These are the disappointments that test a girl's strength of character, and one can hear in fancy the despairing cry, "What am I going to do with this life of mine, which seemed so full of promise, and is now such a barren, hopeless thing?"

The right answer must vary in each individual case; but if despair is kept at bay, and a cheerful, brave outlook is maintained over the opportunities still left, help will come.

Modern life, with all the new openings it has brought for women, has also entailed bitter trials upon many in the way of disappointment. When there was no thought of a gently-bred girl doing anything but lead a domestic life after her schooldays were done, hopes and ambitions were not excited. Now these are constantly around by the ever new possibilities opening before women, and of necessity they must be often frustrated. This trouble is one in which sympathy is by no means readily tendered. One hears people say, "I cannot think why So-and-so is not contented in her good home, and her sisters and parents all so kind and nice!"

Did the kind friend ever think what it must be like to try and live in an exhausted receiver, however "nice" it were to look at? Fortunately people are growing wiser year by year.

What is one to say by way of comfort to the disappointed girl who feels she is hindered by circumstances from fulfilling her true vocation?

First of all—change your circumstances if you can. Do everything, consistent with filial duty, to shape your life to the ends for which you sincerely believe it is most fitted. If your wish is not the result of mere impulse, if you are pleasant about it and above all do not sulk, you will in nine cases out of ten find that with patience you will succeed. Of course, I need hardly say that I am supposing the ambition to be a right and proper one. To see an only daughter deliberately neglecting her obvious duty, because she likes something else better than looking after her home and parents, is a far from edifying spectacle.

If you cannot change your circumstances, then submit with a good grace, and try to find in the immediate surroundings something that will serve as second-best.

Even in this way, many a girl has lived to acknowledge it was well for her that her earliest hopes were baffled. The compensations of life are marvellous, more so than can possibly in youth be understood.

This truth is specially applicable to the third form of disappointment I must notice.

"The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

The girl in a happy home, as she draws near the threshold of womanhood, has a vague but beautiful future before her.

"I wait for my story—the birds cannot sing it,

Not one, as he sits on the tree;

The bells cannot ring it, but long years

O bring it!

Such as I wish it to be."

Nothing is more touching to elder people than this onward-looking vision. It is no shame to the girl if she

"Dreams with what eyes, and what a sweet insistence,
Lovers are waiting in the hidden years."

If she is a girl of good breeding and refinement, she will not talk about it, and certainly will not allow it to be manifest in her behaviour that her one desire is to "get engaged." If she does, she may bid a fond farewell to any such hopes. At the same time I can hardly believe that even "a model to her sex" is at one time or another without some private dreams of happiness, in which she is not alone.

"Alas, how easily things go wrong—
A sigh too deep, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist, and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again."

"A disappointment" in a certain style of parlance has come to mean a trouble connected with this side of a woman's experience.

That there must be such disappointments is perfectly evident when we face even one fact, that half-a-million women, whether they wish it or not, cannot marry because there are more women than men.

The work to be done by unmarried women in these days is daily growing in dignity and importance, and the scorn formerly cast at the "old maid" is now becoming vulgarly inappropriate as well as impertinent. But this is small comfort for the individual girl who has had some cherished dream roughly disturbed, and sees her bright visionary future fade away into "the light of common day."

"When hearts have once mingled,
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
The weak one is singled,
To endure what it once possest.
O Love! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?"

The exquisite words may be re-echoed in anguish of spirit.

How dreary life appears! how sad a lot it seems to have to awaken morning after morning to the same dull, slow-moving hours! and what a long, long future stretches onward before the end is reached! As Pierre Loti has said, "*Toujours se lever; toujours se coucher; toujours manger de la soupe qui n'est pas bonne.*"

Then the grief is all the harder to bear because it cannot be talked about. An arm is broken and friends crowd in with condolences and comfort; a heart is broken, and the victim cannot utter a complaint.

What are we to say? It is hard, and nothing can make it easy. But it is of no use to sit down and lament beside the sufferer.

To the girl who in her inmost heart is conscious of such a "disappointment," and must needs wear a smiling face, I will try and give a word or two of affectionate consolation. But to begin with, I must say, "Live it down!"

You may think this is impossible. It is not impossible at all. The human will is a wonderful power. Each day of resolute effort will make it just a little tiny bit easier to forget him, if "he" has proved unworthy, as alas "he" occasionally does. But some other interest and occupation, distasteful as it may seem at the time, must be brought into the life to fill the void; and of all such interests, occupation for the sake of others is the most healthful. You remember the sister of Sir Percival in the "Holy Grail," who, as

the allegory shows, had gained deep spiritual insight through her grief.

"A holy maid; tho' never maiden glowed,
But that was in her earlier maidenhood,
With such a fervent flame of human love,
Which, being rudely blunted, glanced
and shot,
Only to holy things."

Much work for good; much tending of the poor and needy; much benefit to the world; has been the outcome of a "disappointment," and the woman may live to say, "It is far better as it is."

"But my heart is broken!" you say. My dear child, in all probability it is not broken at all. I could tell you (to look at another aspect of the case) of unhappy girls who have come to me to ask for comfort in some such "disappointment" as I have been speaking about, and who, a year or so afterwards, have written joyful letters to warn me I was going to be invited to their wedding breakfast. And I have known young people who could not be thankful enough that the first affair ended in disappointment.

"When half-gods go,
The gods arrive."

There used to be an idea prevalent among high-toned women, and preached by the author of *John Halifax*, that love was love only once and for ever. The affinity, the twin soul was perceived, and from that instant whatever "his" response, love endured till the end of life.

Sometimes this may be so; as in the wonderful case of Isabel, Lady Burton. But it is not by any means the universal rule. Without incurring the odious reproach of fickleness, it may be possible for a girl, especially a young girl, to make mistakes and take for the love of a lifetime the fancy of a moment.

However this may prove, life in some way will bring comfort.

It is hard to realise it when the heart is aching and sore, and the girl is miserably conscious she is out of harmony with her surroundings at every point; but come! will if life is rightly lived, either in the form of a new love on the ashes of the old, or new occupations to draw out all the forces of the inner nature. There are many loves in life; not, as the poets would have us believe, one only.

But it is fatal to collapse in a sentimental manner, and give oneself up to mourning for the past. I think girls are often very brave in troubles of this sort, and pride may lend a stimulus that is exceedingly wholesome.

Then the most ruthless disappointment in this, as in other forms, may turn out to be an angel in disguise, leading to another and a better way of life.

The sweetest of women-poets, Christina Rossetti, who herself knew the pang of hopes sacrificed, has written allegorical words that may be pondered; and in commending them to the notice of "disappointed" girls I bid such readers a reluctant farewell.

"The fruitless thought of what I might have been,

Haunting me ever, will not let me rest.

A cold North wind has withered all my green,

My sun is in the West.

But where my palace stood, with the same stone

I will uprear a shady hermitage,

And there my spirit shall keep house alone,
Accomplishing its age.

There other garden-beds shall lie around,
Full of sweet-briar and incense-bearing thyme;

There I will sit, and listen for the sound

Of the last lingering chime."