

LETTERS TO YOUNG WOMEN.

Housewifery and Industry.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed in scarlet. \* \* \* \* Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come.—Solomon.

Among the more homely but most essential accomplishments of a young woman is that of housewifery. There are many things at the present day to interfere with its acquisition, but the fact that it is essential should lead you to subordinate to it those which are not. We hear a great deal about the laziness of the present generation of girls. I think this accusation is unjust. Girls who acquire a really good education now accomplish much more genuine hard work than those in "the good old times," who only learned to read and write and occupied the most of their time in the kitchen and dairy. Nothing that can be called education and accomplishment can be achieved without great labor and, in my opinion, the principal reason why good housewifery is so much neglected as an accomplishment, is that the time is so much occupied in study. Laziness is very apt to come with wealth, and there are undoubtedly a great many more lazy girls now than fifty years ago. They are certainly a very undesirable article to have about, and I pity the poor fellow who gets one of them for a companion; but I say candidly that I do not think there are any more naturally lazy girls in the world than usual.

You expect one of these days to be the mistress of a house. Your comfort and happiness, and the comfort and happiness of your husband, will depend very much upon your ability to order that house well. If your companion be in humble circumstances, you will very likely be obliged to do most of the work yourself. In this case a thorough knowledge of and taste for housewifery will be very necessary to you. If you marry a man of competence or wealth, a knowledge of good housewifery is quite as essential to you as if you were required to do your own work. The expenses of your house will be large or small, as you are a bad or a good housekeeper. If you do not know how to do the work of the house, if you have no practical knowledge of all the offices and economies of an establishment, you will be dependent. So far from being the mistress of your house, you will be only its guest. Your servants will circumvent you, they will cheat you, they will make you miserable. If they do not perform their work properly, through wilfulness or ignorance, you cannot tell them how to do better. You will scold them for things which you cannot tell them how to mind. You will be unjust and you will not keep them. Many a real good servant is constantly suffering from grievances growing directly from the ignorance of her mistress. Unless you are willing to take up for life with a boarding house, a place for people to vegetate in, you must be a good housewife. It matters not whether you are rich or poor. You need a practical knowledge of cooking, of the laundry, of the prices and qualities of provisions, of chamber work, of everything that enters into the details of home life.

Of course, if you have no mother

who is capable of teaching you these things you are in a measure excusable for not learning them. I pity a family of girls whose mother is a know-nothing and a do-nothing. I do not blame girls for not wishing to put themselves under the tuition of the cook and the maid-of-all-work. But even when you find yourself under disadvantages like those, you cannot afford to become a woman without knowing something of the homely utilities of life. Your own aptness of mind—your own good sense and ready ingenuity—will give you a clue to the mysteries which practice will ultimately make plain. Your comfort, your independence, your reputation, your husband's respect for you depends so much upon your ability to keep house well that I cannot leave the subject without insisting upon the importance of your learning to do it while you have the chance. There are fewer higher compliments that can be paid to a young woman than that which accords to her, the character of an excellent housekeeper. There is no reputation which will more thoroughly tend to confirm a young woman in the esteem of young men, or more forcibly commend her to their esteem than that of being acquainted practically with the details of the kitchen and the economies of housekeeping. This naturally introduces me to a discussion of the benefits of physical industry and the assumption of regular household duties. There is no better relief to study than the regular performance of special duties in the house. To feel that one is really doing something every day. That the house is tidier for one's efforts, and the comfort of the family enhanced, is the surest warrant of content and cheerfulness.

There is something about this habit of daily work, this regular performance of duty, which tends to regulate the passions, to give calmness and vigor to the mind, to impart a healthy tone to the body, and to diminish the desire for life in the street and for resort to gossiping companions. Were I as rich as Croesus, my girls should have something to do regularly, just as soon as they should become old enough to do anything. They should learn, above all things, to help themselves, and thus to be independent in all circumstances. A woman, helpless from any other cause than sickness, is essentially a nuisance. There is nothing womanly and ladylike in helplessness. My policy would be, as girls grow up to assign to them special duties, first in one part of the house, then in another, until they should become acquainted with all the housewifely offices; and I should have an object in this beyond the simple acquisition of a knowledge of housewifery. It should be for the acquisition of habits of physical industry, of habits that conduce to the health of body and mind, of habits that give them an insight into the nature of labor, and inspire with them a genuine sympathy with those whose lot is to labor. All young mind is uneasy if it be good for anything. There is not the genuine human staff in a girl who is habitually and by nature passive, placid, and inactive. The body and the mind must both be in motion. If the tendency to activity be left to run loose, undirected into channels of usefulness, a spoiled child is the result.

(To be continued.)

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