

SATURDAY, SEPT. 18, 1875.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION.

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In this sterile season for journalists, when topics of sensational interest are notoriously scarce, perhaps our readers will pardon us for calling back their attention to an occurrence of a few days ago, but one which gave prominence to a subject that is ever fresh in its perennial importance. The occurrence we refer to is the meeting of the Economic Section of the British Association; the subject, our national standard of education, with special reference to that of women. At this meeting three statements were made, which, in the main, seemed to find general

acquiescence, and which well deserves to be seriously considered. It was stated by Sir WILLIAM GOSWELL, that the young women of this country have sunk into the depths of frivolity; and this charge seems to have remained uncontroverted. It was also affirmed by the same speaker that the principal cause of this lamentable state of degradation is to be found in the prevailing low character of our current literature; and he emphatically declared that the remedy must be sought in the literature is the reform of the nation. The remedy he proposed for this crying evil was that parents and guardians should maintain "a rigid supervision over the literature to which young girls had access."

Another remedy, and one of a more positive kind was also suggested,—that our young ladies should be taught mathematics. We have not space to discuss the merits of this condition of young Englishwomen, first, as to its prevailing evil; second, as to the main cause of that evil; third, as to its cure. On each of these points we have two or two to say. Of the fact of the prevalence of frivolity of mind among our country-women, and that to a very deplorable extent, there can be unfortunately, we feel no question. It may, however, be fairly said that the charge is not altogether so characteristic among the men to keep their colleagues in countenance. But is it true that English women of the present day are more frivolous than their great grandmothers or than their female ancestors in periods more remote? If the sketches of English life that have been left us by JOHNSON, and by SWIFT, ADDISON, and STRAHLER, are in any degree to be trusted, this question must surely be answered in the negative. The fierce distributives of SWIFT require, no doubt, to be received with considerable qualification. But in the pages of the *Spectator* we meet with pictures of female life, drawn with seriousness and truth; malignant humor is not to be found in the pages of ADDISON, nor in the literature of avowed burlesque. If we were to compare the view given by ADDISON, as a whole, of the English female intellect and character with that given our day by ADDISON's great admirer, our imitator, THACKERAY, the result would be, I think, not very different. We are Englishwomen of our period. THACKERAY assuredly no flatterer. His satire on women is at least as keen as that on men. Pictures of female vanity, of female meanness, he gives in abundance, but he has depicted very few cases of such utter female frivolity as may imboscally as those in which the writer has been so successful in pointing out the way to the acceptable conclusion that in regard to frivolity—moral frivolity at least—Englishwomen of our time are less open to censure than those of days gone by. Rising above intellectual frivolity less advanced, we, we fear, been misled. It is this spirit of the age, mainly, and not the individual, cherishes the other, and no scheme for reformation will, in our view, ever be very effective that is not founded on general intellectual culture. Here we arrive at a second point in question: what is the state of the intellect of the young women of our time among YOUNG WOMEN who we must all admit to prevail? Sir WILLIAM GOSWELL declares to be the character of our modern literature, and especially, as we understand him, of our literature of fiction. He is evidently of the opinion of LUTHER ALBION'S opinion, that a circulating library is an evergreen tree of oblivion, and that the more numerous the branches, the more to contravert the position that much of our evil is caused by indiscriminate novel-reading. We believe the extent of this evil to be not over-rated, and that our modern circulating libraries are often much unduly misallied.

We fully agree with the counter-opinion expressed by JOHN ADDISON, that our young ladies are "the people's professors of the best kind of entertaining literature," before them than we agree with their mothers. The avidity for worthless national novels is the effect rather than the cause of frivolity, for it springs not so much from depraved minds as from the want of a firmness of mind which causes them to think less intellectual exerting to be possessed. We must necessarily lead its followers to seek mental recreation only in that which is easily apprehended by the fancy.

Here we come to our third point; the remedy for the evil. The study of mathematics has been proposed as the great remedy for frivolousness; but, one whose weakness consists in its being too potent, pursue mathematical studies as they ought to be pursued demands the heaviest strain on the reasoning powers that the human mind can bear, and we fear that the proposal would never find general favour within our country-women. Yet this idea in the true one, no real elevation of the intellect can be expected from the study of mathematics, teaching men and women to reason, to the practice at first becomes tedious and well repays its disciple not more than

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