

Woman's Work.

BY LINA MOLLETT.

I.—THORNS, WEEDS, AND FLOWERS.

MODERN enthusiasm for general education for the general public, or, as some prefer to style it, "The Enlightenment of the Masses," is, at all events, beginning to show *some* good results, whatever grumblers may say to the contrary. If properly conducted, general education *does* encourage a good deal of invigorating brain gymnastics, favourable to the subsequent development of interests, that are wholesome relaxations from the speciality we call our "work." More than that, a slight insight into the infinite breadth and depth of *possible* learning, is, and always has been, to anyone inclined to reflect at all, a source of constant humility and tolerance. So vast a vista of what we do *not* know stretches out before us, as we plant our feet firmly on our small square of conquered knowledge, that consciousness of the tolerance our ignorance must plead, for may well make us forbearing with those, who, we may fancy, know a little less. We will feel, too, that our "special" work offers sufficient possibilities of action and improvement for a lifetime, and realise fully why "Jack-of-all-trades was master of none," and never could be. Sympathy with those who, like ourselves, are serving life's apprenticeship, and interest in their efforts, however different from our own, ought surely to be the result of a good education, by which, I mean, one that has engrafted into its disciples the conviction that honest individual effort is beset with difficulties, and that no field of action useful to the community is contemptible or incapable of improvement. Petty, cantankerous fault-finding should perish among those who have sufficient "general education" to grasp the fact that the limits of man's mind are narrow, and that failure is possible in *every* branch of human effort, in our *own* case as in those of our fellow-men. Since the possibility, nay the necessity, of merging the terms "gentle-woman" and "working-woman" has been widely recognised, and woman's labour placed in the balance against man's, we have heard much of the selfish and jealous opposition of the stronger sex, more especially of work underpaid, *because* it was woman's work. That many of these complaints are only too well justified it is impossible to deny, but it is well to make out a

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clear case, and be *just*, before we begin to argue, and above all dispute for rights, or we may find those so-called rights a fruitful source of palpable wrongs, for the development of which we shall, in the first case, have to thank our own semination of the seeds of discord.

If we women really wish to enter the vast world's factory on equal terms with men—that is, as animated machines, to be paid for according to our marketable value—we must fairly and squarely acknowledge that, on the whole (giving a large margin to the numerous exceptions that go to prove the rule), man is a more lusty and reliable piece of machinery than woman. During a recent discussion and investigation of the vexed subject of relative salaries in the case of Government clerks, it was pointed out that female clerks required more frequent holidays.

Upheld by a purpose, women workers do frequently achieve success in walks that would be rough for men to follow; but sudden collapse *has* been known to be the aftermath of a rich harvest reaped by female enterprise; and, on the whole, permanent success and enjoyment of it will depend largely on our knowledge of what is familiarly termed "the length of our tether." Logical argument has hitherto been an *exceptional* power among us, and I am sure many of us have only fully realised the humiliating fact on perusing the combative newspaper tussles of a few of the champions of our rights, many of whose barbed words are obviously doomed to miss their mark, and recoil upon unintended victims.

We have certainly often seen professional men come warmly forward and applaud those who have won laurels in domains hitherto deemed their exclusive hunting-grounds, and the frank "Well done!" that not long ago greeted a young lady student, who, in her mathematical triumphs, left all competitors far behind, had nothing of envy in its ring.

Some of us are still weak-minded or old-fashioned enough to believe that honour *does* come, to whom honour is due, and that work, honestly done for its own sake, carries its own reward with it, and many of us have good reason to doubt the assertion of an amazon of wordy warfare, to the effect that "Chivalry is dead!" No mawkish serenades under our window are likely to disturb our night's rest, it is true; but many a noble woman finds gallant knight proud to buckle on his sword in her service, and ready to go forth on her quest, even in these apparently prosaic days of top-hats and gaiters. I may safely

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)