

WOMEN AND THEIR WORK.

THE LADY ELOCUTIONIST.

OH, the infinite charm of a sweet voice—clear, yet modulated; distinct, yet not rasping nor harsh! It is a gift, indeed; a gift that wins for the happy possessor many more hearts than ever fell victim to the piercing glance of sparkling eyes or have been irresistibly drawn by the smile of beauty. Alas, it is as rare as it is winsome. But art steps in where nature fails. "Elocution is," so commences a book on the subject, "the art of speaking and reading with clearness, distinctness, suitability of gesture, and general artistic effect." Until lately the training of the voice has been strangely neglected, except where singing is concerned. Yet nothing yields more to cultivation, for the voice is emphatically a sympathetic organ, as is proved by the fact that it oftentimes takes the tones of any one with whom one may have been much associated, and by the strange resemblance the voices of brothers and sisters often bear to each other. Elocution and recitation have become analogous terms in men's minds, but there is no need that they should be, save that no reciter can be really good at her art unless she thoroughly understands the former, which is, as it were, the foundation to the house. A bad foundation means failure, however ornamental the structure may be. For good recitation there must always be the power of sympathy; the words must come from the heart if they would reach the hearts of others. Thus it is that the author and the poet are never heard to such perfection as when reciting their own works. A reciter's motto may truly be, "We please to live." What is more enjoyable than to hear our favourite book, which we have read many a time to ourselves, or our favourite poem recited by an able elocutionist? It seems to come like an old friend in a new garb, and we find many beauties, unnoticed before in the familiar verses. Again, there is a great charm in hearing a poem for the first time, enhanced, like a gem richly set, by the subtle power of a rich clear intonation, in which its points are marked by just the right emphasis, and the sweet voice rises and falls like beautiful music on the ear. But the reciter must live as well as please. So now for the practical question of money. Of course, this depends greatly on proficiency. Well-known reciters can earn from five to ten guineas and even more for one evening's entertainment; but these terms are too high to be aspired to by beginners. Besides, it is necessary to form a connection, and that takes time. So for those who have no private means to fall back on, teaching elocution at schools, &c., is likely to provide a regular income, and

therefore the best line to take up. Appointments for such are increasing, as people feel more and more the importance of this neglected branch of a child's education; also more private lessons can be obtained. There is room, I believe, for both teacher and reciter at the top of the ladder, but they must excel to succeed. With regard to learning, Miss Rossi, the well-known reciter, gives lessons, and is very successful, I believe. She has given careful study to the art of elocution. Her address is 31, Westbourne Street, Sloane Square, S.W. Her terms are three guineas for ten lessons; classes of six, two guineas. She considers that about a year's study should be sufficient for an average pupil. Of course, ability must be taken into consideration with regard to time. The natural gifts most required are, she says:—(1) A fairly good ear, not necessarily a musical one, but rather one good for acquiring languages. (2) A vivid imagination. (3) An infinite capacity for taking pains." This latter because the minutiae of detail needed and the constant practice needed before perfection is attained, make patience needful for the learner. But nothing we know is acquired without trouble.

It is a pity there are not more amateur lady reciters. At present those who are not musical are content to listen. Why, might they not, however, by a good recitation sometimes entertain their friends right merrily? Leastways it would be a change from that "everlasting music," as some one once irreverently called it. Those who have weak voices and throats would also derive real benefit from learning elocution. "A knowledge of elocution," to quote Miss Rossi again, "when based, as it should be, on voice production, strengthens and improves the quality of any voice, however weak." Miss Rossi is an authority on the voice, which she has made her special study. She is also, I hear, an able and sympathetic elocutionist, whose "talent is essentially dramatic." "The New Reciter, Reader, and Orator," by F. G. Webb, is a most useful book for amateurs, containing many different styles, and it also has some clever prefatory chapters on "How to recite."

In my article on actresses in a former number, I warned my readers against bogus advertisements and fraudulent teachers of the dramatic art. I now wish to recommend one who is really able to instruct thoroughly, as will be easily conceived when I mention the name—Mrs. John Billington, the well-known actress. She has only lately begun to give lessons, and prepare "ladies and gentlemen for the stage, and instruct them in all branches of elocution and recitation." Her terms are six guineas for twelve private lessons. Many

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