

ART. VII.—"THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES."¹

AMONG the social changes which have taken place in the last forty years, few have been, and few are destined to be, of greater influence than the improved facilities for education offered to girls in the higher middle and middle classes of society. I speak of forty years because it was in 1864 that the House of Commons gave authority to a Royal Commission to extend its inquiries into the state of the education of *girls*. It was in 1865 that Miss Davies and Miss Buss, and in 1866 that Miss Beale and six other ladies, were called to give evidence before this Commission.

When we speak of education to-day, apart from technical and professional training, we are accustomed to divide it into "elementary" and "secondary." Forty years ago, in the sense in which we now use the term, *organized* "secondary" education for girls did not exist. Besides the elementary and dames' schools (attended by the children of the poor), there were the "seminaries for young ladies," the private boarding-school, and the daily or resident governess. I have no intention of estimating the education then given in girls' schools, but probably, as a rule, when judged by the standard of to-day, it was extremely inefficient, though certainly brilliant exceptions existed; but I fancy it would generally be found in those days that a really well-educated woman was one who had been educated at home.

To-day the conditions are entirely different. We have now all over the country a very large number of both public and private schools for girls, which, judged by even a high educational standard, must be pronounced as exceedingly satisfactory. Among the "public" schools, I refer, of course, to the many high schools, and girls' grammar-schools, and the schools of the Church Schools Company and of the Girls' Public Day-Schools Company. Of public "secondary" schools for girls there must to-day be at least two hundred in England alone.

Besides these schools, there are the "University" colleges for women, such as Girton and Newnham at Cambridge, St. Hugh's and Lady Margaret Halls and Somerville College at Oxford, Holloway College at Egham, Cheltenham, Bedford, and Westfield Colleges, and the women's departments in connection with the Victoria University in Manchester and Liverpool.²

I believe that anyone who has at all an intimate acquaint-

¹ "The Conflict of Duties, and other Essays." By Alice Gardner, Lecturer of Newnham College, Cambridge. London, 1903.

² This list is not exhaustive.

ance with the education of girls will admit that between these women's colleges—where, to all intents and purposes, a University education is offered—and the various public high schools for girls, as well as a great number of the best private schools, there is to-day a very close connection. This connection, if I may so define it, is both “downwards and upwards,” or, perhaps still more correctly, both “backwards and forwards.” My meaning is as follows: (1) A very large and constantly-growing proportion of the teachers in these schools have been educated in one or other of these University colleges. *From* these colleges these teachers bring *into* the schools, not merely the scholastic knowledge they have there acquired, but those indefinable qualities of character and influence—thoughts, ideas, and ideals, mental and moral atmosphere, views of human nature (its purposes and possibilities), as well as standards of life and conduct—which, to a great extent, permeate every really good educational establishment, in which, under the same teachers, engaged in the same studies, and many of them having the same purpose in life, a number of men or women live and work for months and years together.

(2) On the other hand, not a few of the girls in these schools are looking forward to proceeding to these colleges, and of these a large proportion are hoping ultimately to become teachers; thus, they are particularly anxious, even before entering these colleges, to learn from their teachers, who have already passed through them, something of their life and ideals.

My purpose in all I have so far written is to show what an immense influence these University colleges for women must have upon the girls (the future mothers) of the upper middle and middle classes of English society. Indeed, it would be impossible to exaggerate either the strength or the importance of this influence. And, of course, the influence of the colleges will, to a great extent, be the influence, not merely of the heads, but of the teachers and lecturers in these colleges. Personally, I have a strong conviction that this great movement for the higher and better education of girls owes its remarkable success mainly to the excellent nature of the influence which these women, as a body, have exerted upon their pupils, and, through these, upon the secondary schools for girls throughout the country.

Now, every true parent will surely seek to know, not merely what branches of knowledge (commonly called “lessons”) his or her daughters are learning at school, but under what kind of influence they are—what ideas or ideals of life, duty, conduct, and religion, are being, directly or indirectly, placed before them.

As a very valuable help towards acquiring this knowledge, may I commend to the study of all who are interested in higher education, and especially to those who have daughters either at school or college, a volume of short essays which has quite lately been published—viz., "The Conflict of Duties," by Miss Alice Gardner, who has for some years been one of the lecturers at Newnham?

In the preface the origin of the essays is clearly explained: of the eighteen which the book contains, sixteen were read at the Sunday afternoon meetings of a society of students at the college. "The members of this society were not all of one way of thinking or of upbringing: they belonged to various Churches or to no Church; they pursued various lines of study, and differed greatly in their acquaintance with the world and with books." Miss Gardner further states that, "In writing papers for such an audience, one naturally tried to keep on ground that was common to the larger number, and to throw out suggestions for the more independent thinkers, without becoming unintelligible or repellent to such as had not looked far beyond the traditional landmarks."

I can well understand some parents being at least startled at the thought of the possibilities of treatment which these words might imply. If there are such, I would only ask them to reserve their judgment upon the teaching which the book contains until they have read through it from cover to cover. With particular sentences and judgments they may strongly disagree, but, taking the book as a whole, of its influence for good there can, I think, be no possible doubt.

A teacher of experience who wishes to interest the members of a society where attendance is purely voluntary will naturally choose subjects for treatment or discussion which she feels sure will be of interest to the majority of the members of the society. A glance at the titles of the various papers in this book shows the nature of the subjects of which Miss Gardner found this to be true. Among these we find, "The Conflict of Duties" (which gives the title to the book), "The Religious Needs of the Intellectual Life," "Sectarianism," "Wear and Tear," "Symbolism in Religion," "Religious Instruction in Schools," "Religion and Good Taste," "Confession and Spiritual Direction," "Man's Responsibility for his Beliefs."

The very titles of these subjects may seem to confirm the fear of that possibly unwise freedom of treatment which the preface at least suggested. But again I plead for reservation of judgment, and I ask my readers to remember: (1) That these subjects *interested* the hearers; (2) that everything depends upon the *spirit in which* they are approached, and in the nature of the judgments of the writer herself.

With regard to the *tone* of the teaching—the *spirit* in which the subjects are treated—the most fastidious could take no exception. The tone is throughout dignified and lofty; the spirit is altogether reverent. Upon the writer's particular judgments the opinions of various readers will naturally differ.

Undoubtedly, for good or for evil, there are questions and subjects which are regarded as "matter for discussion" to-day, which were certainly not so regarded in the past. The present, if we read its literature, seems to be an age of "problems." They are of very various kinds, and they meet us at every turn. In the past, when questions arose, it may have been the custom to settle them by "authority." That method—at least, to the same extent—is no longer possible. Not only the subjects, but the authorities upon them, to-day are "questioned."

Miss Gardner, in her preface as well as in her essays, realizes that the pressure of some of these problems—especially those which may be described as "social and religious"—upon the minds of those who are beginning to think for themselves is undoubtedly great, and that it is neither possible nor wise for the teacher "to be prepared with ready-made solutions, adapted to the needs of every inquiring mind." She would not attempt to give decisive answers, but would rather help, by means of "general indications"—by which, we presume, she means "principles"—"to indicate along what lines, and in what conditions, each inquirer may hope to find his personal difficulties solved."

It is easy to see that there may be dangers in the "cut and dried" or decisive answer to a social or religious problem. I am considering such an answer as given to a girl who, as I said, has already begun to think for herself. Parents may, of course, quote "the Church." But within even the Church of England different parties give very different answers to the same question. Again, parents may give their own personal opinion, but that opinion may have been formed to meet circumstances and conditions very different from the present. They may quote some authority eminent in their own younger days, but the heroes of our children may be very different from, without being any worse than, our own.

An admirable example of the wisdom of Miss Gardner's method is found in the short paper upon "Confession and Spiritual Direction," which, a note tells us, was written as suggestions preparatory to a general discussion.

Here, if anywhere, is a subject upon which people hold the most contrary and the most decided opinions; it is also a subject upon which the vast majority seem incapable of speaking calmly. How does Miss Gardner approach it? To

begin with, she shows that to some, from force of circumstances which never should have arisen, even regular and systematic confession has become something more than even a help; it may unfortunately have become, so they think, a necessity, if they are to live their life at its best. To others the very mention of the word "confession" is sufficient to excite a feeling of horror, and to call forth at least strong, if not unguarded, language.

Miss Gardner—who evidently knows human nature, especially in its younger years—recognises that this human nature of ours "needs advice, guidance, exhortation, inspiration, and not seldom rebuke, or revelation of its own weaknesses and deficiencies to itself"; and that it needs all these more directly and more personally than "any general pulpit exhortation" can ever provide.

What clergyman is there who does not know of young people of both sexes—*e.g.*, members of his Confirmation classes—starting upon the path of an earnest Christian life, full of questions, and longing for help and sympathy, and yet who cannot obtain these from their parents? To these, even if religion be a form and a convention, it may be nothing more. The young people soon learn that their parents cannot enter into, much less sympathize with, their difficulties. In cases like these, if the young people seek "spiritual direction" outside the home, the cause and the blame lie with the parents, who have not qualified themselves to foster and nurture the best and deepest elements in their children's natures.

Miss Gardner then shows the difference between regular, systematic, compulsory confession, as taught by the Church of Rome, and "spiritual direction" as permitted by the Church of England. She shows how "we find men in various ages who had a reputation for understanding the needs of the spirit, and whose characters commanded confidence. Such was Jeremy Taylor, whom John Evelyn looked to as a spiritual adviser. Many Puritan ministers held strong views as to the necessity of spiritual discipline and of a stringent examination before Communion." As to the growth of the custom of private or auricular confession, Miss Gardner shows, from an intimate knowledge of the life and conditions of the early Middle Ages, how the practice gradually became general. It may then have served a purpose, and in rough and lawless times may have even supplied a want. At the same time Miss Gardner very clearly points out the terrible dangers with which the practice is attended, and the evils with which it has been, and must be, fraught.

The whole treatment of the subject is eminently charitable

and sympathetic, and is so pursued that it could not hurt the most sensitive feelings. Perhaps Miss Gardner's own opinion may be regarded as expressed in the following sentences: “We want some means of availing ourselves of the experience of other people. We can, of course, do this to some extent by conversation with experienced persons or by reading good biographies. Yet many people have no friends from whom they can get much real moral help, and are unable to find their experiences exactly like those recorded in books. How many of us may have gone the wrong way to work in trying to make head against a bad habit! . . . How much help some suggestive thoughts of others might at times give to us, whether in the way of encouragement or of warning! There seems a field open for spiritual experts, who, like skilled physicians, might use their knowledge to recommend to one sick person a remedy which has proved effectual in a similar case.”

Another subject which Miss Gardner treats in a similar spirit is that which she has chosen as the title of the volume. One of the chief difficulties which frequently confronts a girl who has arrived at the age of “young womanhood” is admirably described as a “Conflict of Duties.” In other words, what, under certain particular circumstances, is her *paramount* duty? Now, so long as that word can be used only in the singular her course is clear. But, unfortunately, she finds herself constantly arriving at a “cross-roads,” where the various arms of the signpost may each be inscribed, “To Duty.” Which road ought she to pursue? She cannot, as Miss Gardner says, walk to the right hand and to the left at the same time; and even important duties sometimes are in very real conflict, with such other, just as are very admirable ideals, and even principles of life. On the one hand may be the duty to parents, to home, to society; on the other may be that duty which may be described as “self-culture, with a view to an ultimately wider usefulness to our fellows.” Again, there may be the duty of a more rigorous self-discipline, the duty to religion, which seems to conflict with an apparently worldly life. Here, again, Miss Gardner refuses to give any ready-made answer; she even recognises that the rule which would bid us follow “the supreme authority of the individual conscience” needs careful qualification, because “those who rest on this as an ultimate ground make two immense assumptions: (1) That the voice of conscience is always to be clearly distinguished from the promptings of affection, of habit, or of tradition; and (2) that the conscience itself does not need training and cultivating.”

How rarely do we find it so clearly recognised as here that

"I have done what my conscience told me" may be an utterly insufficient reason for a certain line of conduct! The *qualification* of the individual conscience to acquit or condemn—depending upon its training, cultivation, and refinement—must be taken into account.

In this same chapter we find many examples of another feature and charm—indeed, of the usefulness of the book. By this I mean the value of the "by-products" discovered or thrown up in the course of some investigation. Take the following dicta from this same chapter: "People have no right to complain of a conflict of duties when they have undertaken more than lies within their capacity." Or again: "This thought—that most of us habitually acknowledge the obligation lying upon us to do a good many things which we are quite incapable of doing, if we adequately discharge other obligations, which we regard as more seriously incumbent on us—this thought should, I say, make us more tolerant in judging the shortcomings of other people, and may sometimes lead us to attribute the conduct of our neighbours to their peculiar notion of the relative importance of various duties, instead of stigmatizing them as negligent of duty altogether." And when occasion demands it Miss Gardner can be most decisive—viz.: "After all, the most important and undoubted duties of man cannot collide. Truthfulness, kindness, loyalty, courage: these are virtues which we are bound to practise under all circumstances." And again: "Our thirst for personal happiness can never be satisfied till we cease to attend to it."

Another extremely valuable essay is that upon "Wear and Tear," by which Miss Gardner means the tremendous cost, materially, physically, and intellectually, and, alas! too often morally and spiritually, at which modern life is too often lived.

The whole of this essay is a striking combination of keen insight, shrewd observation, and eminently wise advice. First, Miss Gardner deals with the *cause* of this "wear and tear." It lies in "the competition and the restlessness which pervades social life at the present time. Everybody is struggling for something—either for a living, or for what he regards as better living, for elbow-room, or for a position of vantage." People who work at all must work at such pressure that they all too frequently break down. Hence "the cry for more holidays and more frequent change of surroundings." But wherefore this fierceness of competition? To a great extent, Miss Gardner believes, it is caused by the desire to be able to maintain a high (material) standard of comfort, which so many now regard as necessary. "Young people . . . com-

monly insist on making their start in life from the point which their parents only reached after years of laborious effort and frugal living." The luxuries of an age not long past have become the necessaries of to-day. "We almost all fix our standard of expenditure by that of those in our circle of society who have the largest means, and consequently men overwork themselves and women harass themselves to prevent the horror of having to lower that standard, and confess that it never should have been theirs."

What admirable advice is contained in the following words: "The change I would wish to see made is a revision of our list—I mean of the list that we practically make each for ourselves—of the 'necessaries of life,' and the striking out of all such as are not of vital importance to health, decency, culture, social amenity, and morality." And again: "Let us provide for necessaries first; and among necessaries, let us put prominently forward freedom from harassing and fruitless cares."

As an example of the way in which a subject of constant, and sometimes very unedifying controversy may be lifted upon a higher plane, discussed with reference to far wider issues, and shown to have a close connection, not merely with personal likes and dislikes (so called), or with knowledge and ignorance—as is sometimes assumed—take the essay upon "Symbolism in Religion." How much more dignified is such a title than one like "The Ritualistic Question"! There is little of the controversial in Miss Gardner's treatment; and I would heartily commend a careful study of this essay to anyone—and how many such there are!—who is inclined to judge and hastily condemn their neighbours, who in their worship may prefer more or less symbolism than themselves.

To those clergymen who are called upon to minister to more or less educated congregations, this book should prove a most valuable help. It will give them an admirable insight into the mental and religious atmosphere in which the women and girls among their hearers either have been or are being educated. It will show them the difficulties with which many of these are struggling, the problems with which they are face to face. There is, however, a somewhat painful side to the book as far as some of the clergy are concerned. But, even if painful, this aspect may be salutary. More than once Miss Gardner hints that in the preaching and teaching of many of the clergy educated women do not find the help for which they are longing. It may still be true of some women, that whereas "men go to church for the sermon, women go for the service"; but it is not by any means true of all. If the clergy wish to retain and strengthen the hold of Christian truth upon the future mothers of the educated classes, they

will find an admirable help towards learning how to do so from this book.

I would end as I began—viz., by a strong commendation of this book to all who (1) would know what subjects are evidently interesting the more thoughtful young women at the present day, and who (2) wish to have some assurance of the excellence of the influence which the centres of the highest education are exercising upon them.

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.

ART. VIII.—THE MONTH.

THE joint meeting of the Convocations of Canterbury and York, with the Houses of Laymen of the two Provinces, resulted in fairly satisfactory conclusions, but served also to illustrate the unpractical elements which must at present attach to all such gatherings. The most satisfactory part of the proceedings was the conduct of the business by the Archbishop of Canterbury, which elicited the warm admiration of the whole Assembly. But one circumstance alone was sufficient to give a mark of unreality to the debates. After the opening remarks of the Archbishop, the preamble was moved by the Bishop of Salisbury in a speech of due comprehensiveness and consequently of due length; but after these opening statements all speakers were limited to ten minutes. Of course, such a regulation was imperative if the business was to be got through in two days; but if the constitution of a Council really representative of the Church of England had been seriously contemplated, its discussion in ten minutes speeches would have been absurd. A generation ago, a ten minutes Reform Bill was a matter of political ridicule; but to construct what was intended to be a governing body for the whole Church of England, which would practically supersede both Parliament and the Convocations, within two days, after a discussion in ten minutes speeches, would be at least reckless. A greater legislative operation than transforming the government and administration of the English Church can hardly be imagined. The reconstitution of the Irish Church, which occupied the best energies of Parliament for a considerable part of one Session, was a small matter in comparison. Fortunately, even if the construction of such a body were really proposed, the proposals when drafted by this scratch assembly would have to be submitted to Parliament before they could become effective, and we may be quite sure that the House of Commons