CAN WOMEN THINK?

One of Them Argues on the Negative Side of the Question.

The most striking paper in a recent issue of the *Universal Review* is entitled, "On a Certain Deficiency in Women," and written by Miss Fletcher, the author of "Kismet," "Vestiga," and one or two other delightful stories, who vails her identity under the nom de plume of George Fleming. The problem proposed in this paper is "Have women a capacity for serious thinking?"—a question of which the writer plainly espouses the negative side. And the one great reason for their failure, she alleges, is one so full of force, of unerring insight and of actual truth that it is impossible to deny it—the reason that women are practically never alone. "In the present writer's eyes," she says, "that disability consists almost entirely in the feminine incapacity or radical disinclination (the word matters little) for serious concentrated and continued thought. And this again derives in a great measure from the crowded life, the gregarious habits, the sheep-like falling and halting of educated women. Whether it is imposed on them or accepted by them, the result, so far as art and morals are concerned, remains the same." There is a depth of significance in this. To a woman in what is conventionally known as good society the love of solitude is utterly unknown. She is chaperoned and escorted and companioned till she has not only no clear idea of her own identity, but no very clear identity of which to have an idea. To achieve this result is, under circumstances that very frequently occur, a tax that becomes a serious burden materially as well as a constant clog mentally. A man may betake himself to any place or resort he pleases, be a spectator of its life, and yet retains, if he likes, the personal solitude of the primæval wilderness; but if a woman would go to the mountains, to the sea, to the city—anywhere she will—she must have at least a woman companion with her in the guise of a chaperone, friend or maid.

Otherwise she will require at best a reputation for eccentricity, and, at worst, something even less desirable. And thus she never tastes the sweets of solitude. She never knows the silence of her inspirations. "There is scarcely one man in a thousand," says Miss Fletcher, "who, at some time in his life, has not felt and indulged the impulse to step out from the rank and file of his familiars and his contemporaries, and envisage his own nature stripped of its forms and surroundings; not a man worthy of the name but has searched for and found himself, has hewn out his conviction and wrestled, like Jacob, through the long nights of his youth, with the stern-browed angel of some revelation. And all this implies voluntary solitude; it implies an impassioned interest in the impersonal and continuous habit of the mind. And are such things, then, finally denied to the largest half of our adult population?" As society goes, they are; and it is hardly an extravagance to say that this denial of individual freedom is the most inimical influence to women's intellectual achievements. To a woman living without members of her own family this unwritten law becomes a severe financial tax. In at least half the affairs of her life she must duplicate her expenses. Whenever she takes her walks abroad, so to speak, she must invite a lady companion, and, as her companion is her guest, she must be entertained, both in the sordid matter of bills paid, but in what is often more—in giving her time and energy to her guest. Thus she is severely handicapped for intellectual work. She is cabined, cribbed, confined. She can command no conditions for serious thought. And, "without serious thought behind it—a serious habit of thought"—as George Fleming well says, "talent of which the world is full lowers to the merest monkey trick of the imagination; a thing pliable to fashion, at once reigning over and dependent upon the idlest whims of the day."

THE FAMILY PURSE.

Why Women Are Entitled to a Part of Its Contents as a Right.

In the want of a proper understanding between a husband and his wife concerning pecuniary matters lies a source of friction. Where the management and labor of a wife count as nothing she is conscious of injustice and wrong. "My dear," said an eminent philanthropist to his wife one day as he suddenly burst into the sitting-room, "I have been counting the windows in our house and find there are forty. It just occurs to me that you have to keep these forty windows clean, or superintend the process, and that is not the beginning of your work. All these rooms have to be swept and garnished, the carpets made and cleaned, the house linen prepared and kept in order, besides the cooking to be done, and I took it all as a matter of course. I just begin to see what a woman's work is, even when she has help, which you are not always able to procure. You ought to receive a monthly stipend as a housekeeper would. Why haven't you made me see it before? I have not been just to you while I have been generous to others."

The wife, who told this in after years, sat down with her husband and for the first time since her marriage opened her heart freely on the topic of woman's allowance. She confessed to having had many a sorrowful hour at her position as a beggar. At the head of a large household in a western town where domestic service was both scant and incompetent, she had hardly been trusted with $5 at a time during their united lives.

"Robert and I talked it over," she said, "and decided that the woman who takes care of any household article, like a carpet, for instance, from the time it is first made till it is worn out has expended upon it an amount of time and strength fully equal to the labor that made it, counting from the shearing of the wool till it comes from the loom. It may be unskilled work, but it is work all the same. And this is only one small item in her housekeeping labor. Does not she deserve some payment besides her board and clothing?

"Robert saw woman's work in a new light. From that time until to-day he has placed a generous share of his income in my hands, not as a gift but as a right. And he knows that I will no more fritter it away than he will. If I choose to deny myself something I need and bestow its cost in charity or buy some books I crave, he no more thinks of chiding me than I think of chiding him for spending his money as he likes," says *Good-Housekeeping*.

There are other Roberts who have yet to learn this lesson of justice, and they are found in every walk of life. I have known rich men who were ready to buy silks, velvets and diamonds for their wives, sometimes far beyond what were desired, yet who grudgingly doled out five dollars at a time when appealed to for money. The reason given is that it may be spent foolishly. If any thing will prolong babyhood into maturity it is such treatment. Against it a woman's nature rises in rebellious indignation. Thoughts of bitterness rankle in the wounded heart, and there are flighty, mocking, flippant creatures made so by just this want of trust on the part of their husbands. The gravest and most elusive faults are always found among dependent classes.

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