

The strengthening and purifying of character, the drawing out and developing of natural powers, the mastery over the lower self of mere impulse and selfish desire—in a word, the perfecting of personality, as far as in this mortal life is possible. These are the legitimate results of well-chosen work; while the stunting of character, and the dwarfing of natural capacities, are the inevitable effects of shirking work.

“The great Angel of Work cannot be put aside with impunity, and to lose his teaching is to lose almost the best thing which earthly life can offer. What we use grows with the using; what we are afraid to use shrinks and dwindles, and perishes. If we tie up one arm for a week, will not the muscles be soft and flabby at the end? And are not the minds, and sometimes too, the bodies, of many well-to-do women, soft, and flabby, and sick? These women have not harkened to the voice of the Angel; or else they are so buttressed up and buttressed in by social restrictions; so entangled by social bonds, to put it as Tennyson does, with incomparable prettiness, so ‘compassed by sweet observances,’ that they are helpless and crippled without artificial support. Those who are afraid, or perhaps only pretend to be afraid, lest women, by touching politics or business, should lose any gift or grace of womanhood, merely show that they do not believe in the thing which they profess to praise. The real thing will stand wear and tear. That a certain selfish hardness, a roughness of moral texture, is apparent in the characters of women as well as of men in our time just as it has been obvious in all times, though the precise form it takes may differ, nobody can deny. But how can women, any more than men, escape the influence of environment? Where is this hardness, this selfishness in the pursuit of material enjoyment, this disregard of social obligations, most evident? Not, assuredly, among the women who work, but among idle women. And the antidote to it is, not to take away any element out of life, but to bring in more

and better elements; not, therefore, to restrict the interests and activities of women in any department of life, public or private, but to develop in women the sense of serious responsibility, and how can this sense of responsibility be deepened unless opportunity for exercising it be widened? What is truly unwomanly, indeed, infra-human, is the frivolous pursuit of selfish gratification, whether in social functions, or simply in amusement, in itself innocent. It is this which hardens, it is this which degrades ‘Love, not pleasure,’ says Carlyle; again, ‘Love God; this is the everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved; wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him. Work, duty, responsibility, the awakening to claims and interests beyond our own small personal and family interests—for family selfishness may only be a doubled or trebled selfishness—these form the antidote to that desolating frivolity which springs from vanity of mind.

“The third gift remains, the greatest of all, because more purged from self: the gift of service. The measure of our power to serve may indeed be small, but it is real. It may rest as much in being as in doing, but being and doing are inextricably bound up together, and we cannot be unless we also do. ‘What else are we born for,’ says Carlyle once more, ‘save to expend every particle of strength that God has given us in doing the work for which we are fit; to stand up to it to the last breath of life, and to do our best.’

“THE WORK FOR WHICH WE ARE FIT: What that is we have got to find out, obeying neither the lure of personal vanity, nor the dictates of popular prejudice. Nor need our individual smallness discourage us. For even if public work does not fall to our share—but, I repeat, this is an imperative duty for some—still, we, as individuals, cannot help touching and influencing one another by what we are. The less, perhaps, we think about such influence, the better, but we ought to realise what a tremendous