

WOMAN.

THERE have been no topics, for the last two years, more generally talked of than woman, and "the sphere of woman." In society, everywhere, we hear the same oft-repeated things said upon them by those who have little perception of the difficulties of the subject; and even the clergy have frequently flattered "the feebler sex," by proclaiming to them from the pulpit what lovely things they may become, if they will only be good, quiet, and gentle, attend exclusively to their domestic duties, and the cultivation of religious feelings, which the other sex very kindly relinquish to them as their inheritance. Such preaching is very popular!

Blessed indeed would that man be, who could penetrate the difficulties of this subject, and tell the world faithfully and beautifully what new thing he has discovered about it, or what old truth he has brought to light. The poet's lovely vision of an ethereal being, hovering half seen above him, in his hour of occupation, and gliding gently into his retirement, sometimes a guardian angel, sometimes an unobtrusive companion, wrapt in a silvery veil of mildest radiance, his idealized Eve or Ophelia, is an exquisite picture for the eye; the sweet verse in which he tells us of her, most witching music to the ear; but she is not woman, she is only the spiritualized image of that tender class of women he loves the best,—one whom no true woman could or would become; and if the poet could ever be unkind, we should deem him most so when he reproves the sex, planted as it is in the midst of wearing cares and perplexities, for its departure from this high, beatified ideal of his, to which he loves to give the name of woman. Woman may be soothed by his sweet numbers, but she cannot be helped by his counsels, for he knows her not as she is and must be. All adjusting of the whole sex to a sphere is vain, for no two persons naturally have the same. Character, intellect creates the sphere of each. What is individual and peculiar to each determines it. We hear a great deal everywhere of the religious duties of women. That heaven has placed man and woman in different positions, given them different starting points, (for what is the whole of life, with its varied temporal relations, but a starting

point,) there can be no doubt; but religion belongs to them as beings, not as male and female. The true teacher addresses the same language to both. Christ did so, and this separation is ruinous to the highest improvement of both. Difference of position surely does not imply different qualities of head and heart, for the same qualities, as we see every day, are demanded in a variety of positions, the variety merely giving them a different direction.

As we hear a great deal in society, and from the pulpit, of the religious duties of women, so do we hear a great deal of the contemplative life they lead, or ought to lead. It seems an unknown, or at least an unacknowledged fact, that in the spot where man throws aside his heavy responsibilities, his couch of rest is often prepared by his faithful wife, at the sacrifice of all her quiet contemplation and leisure. She is pursued into her most sacred sanctuaries by petty anxieties, haunting her loneliest hours, by temptations taking her by surprise, by cares so harassing, that the most powerful talents and the most abundant intellectual and moral resources are scarce sufficient to give her strength to ward them off. If there is a being exposed to turmoil and indurating care, it is woman, in the retirement of her own home; and if she makes peace and warmth there, it is not by her sweet religious sensibility, her gentle benevolence, her balmy tenderness, but by a strength and energy as great and untiring as leads man to battle, or supports him in the strife of the political arena, though these sturdier qualities unfold often, both in man and woman, in an atmosphere of exquisite refinement and sensibility. The gentle breeze of summer pauses to rest its wing upon the broad oak-leaf, as upon the violet's drooping flower. If woman's position did not bring out all the faculties of the soul, we might demand a higher for her; but she does not need one higher or wider than nature has given her. Very few of her sex suspect even how noble and beautiful is that which they legitimately occupy, for they are early deprived of the privilege of seeing things as they are.

In our present state of society woman possesses not; she is under possession. A dependant, except in extreme hours of peril or moral conflict, when each is left to the mercy of the unfriendly elements alone, for in every mental or physical crisis of life the Infinite has willed each soul to be alone,

nothing interposing between it and himself. At times, when most a being needs protection, none but the highest can protect. Man may soothe, but he cannot shelter from, or avert the storm, however solemnly he may promise it to himself or others in the bright hours. When most needed he is most impotent.

Woman is educated with the tacit understanding, that she is only half a being, and an appendage. First, she is so to her parents, whose opinions, perhaps prejudices, are engraven into her before she knows what an opinion is. Thus provided she enters life, and society seizes her; her faculties of observation are sharpened, often become fearfully acute, though in some sort discriminating, and are ever after so occupied with observing that she never penetrates. In the common course of events she is selected as the life-companion of some one of the other sex; because selected, she fixes her affections upon him, and hardly ventures to exercise upon him even her powers of observation. Then he creates for her a home, which should be constructed by their mutual taste and efforts. She finds him not what she expected; she is disappointed and becomes captious, complaining of woman's lot, or discouraged and crushed by it. She thinks him perfect, adopts his prejudices, adds them to her early stock, and ever defends them with his arguments; where she differs from him in taste and habits, she believes herself in the wrong and him in the right, and spends life in conforming to him, instead of moulding herself to her own ideal. Thus she loses her individuality, and never gains his respect. Her life is usually bustle and hurry, or barren order, dreary decorum and method, without vitality. Her children perhaps love her, but she is only the upper nurse; the father, the oracle. His wish is law, hers only the unavailing sigh uttered in secret. She looks out into life, finds nothing there but confusion, and congratulates herself that it is man's business, not hers, to look through it all, and find stern principle seated tranquilly at the centre of things. Is this woman's destiny? Is she to be the only adventurer, who pursues her course through life aimless, tossed upon the waves of circumstance, intoxicated by joy, panic-struck by misfortune, or stupidly receptive of it? Is she neither to soar to heaven like the lark, nor bend her way, led by an unerring guide, to climes

congenial to her nature? Is she always to flutter and flutter, and at last drop into the wave? Man would not have it so, for he reveres the gently firm. Man does not ridicule nor expose to suffering the woman who aspires, he wishes not for blind reverence, but intelligent affection; not for supremacy, but to be understood; not for obedience, but companionship; it is the weak and ignorant of her own sex who brand her, but the enigma still remains unsolved, why are so many of the sex allowed to remain weak and frivolous?

The minor cares of life thronging the path of woman, demand as much reflection and clear-sightedness, and involve as much responsibility, as those of man. Why is she not encouraged to think and penetrate through externals to principles? She should be seen, after the first dreamlike years of unconscious childhood are passed, meekly and reverently questioning and encouraged to question the opinions of others, calmly contemplating beauty in all its forms, studying the harmony of life, as well as of outward nature, deciding nothing, learning all things, gradually forming her own ideal, which, like that represented in the sculptured figures of the old Persian sovereigns, should cheerfully and protectingly hover over her. Society would attract her, and then gracefully mingling in it, she should still be herself, and there find her relaxation, not her home. She should feel that our highest hours are always our lonely ones, and that nothing is good that does not prepare us for these. Beautiful and graceful forms should come before her as revelations of divine beauty, but no charm of outward grace should tempt her to recede one hair's breadth from her uncompromising demand for the noblest nature in her chosen companion, guided in her demands by what she finds within herself, seeking an answering note to her own inner melody, but not sweetly lulling herself into the belief that she has found in him the full-toned harmony of the celestial choirs. If her demand is satisfied, let her not lean, but attend on him as a watchful friend. Her own individuality should be as precious to her as his love. Let her see that the best our most sympathising friend can do for us is, to throw a genial atmosphere around us, and strew our path with golden opportunities; but our path can never be another's, and we must always walk alone. Let no drudgery degrade

her high vocation of creator of a happy home. Household order must prevail, but let her ennable it by detecting its relation to that law which keeps the planets in their course. Every new relation and every new scene should be a new page in the book of the mysteries of life, reverently and lovingly perused, but if folded down, never to be read again, it must be regarded as only the introduction to a brighter one. The faults of those she loves should never be veiled by her affection, but placed in their true relation to character, by the deep insight with which she penetrates beneath them. With high heroic courage, she should measure the strength of suffering before it comes, that she may not meet it unprepared. Her life-plan should be stern, but not unyielding. Her hours, precious treasures lent to her, carefully to be protected from vulgar intrusion, but which women are constantly scattering around them, like small coin, to be picked up by every needy wayfarer. Thought should be her atmosphere ; books her food ; friends her occasional solace. Prosperity will not dazzle her, for her own spirit is always brighter than its sunshine, and if the deepest sorrow visits her, it will only come to lift her to a higher region, where, with all of life far beneath her, she may sit regally apart till the end.

Is this the ideal of a perfect woman, and if so, how does it differ from a perfect man ?

W. N.