without them? Can too much be said of their work, the result of which is so beneficial— their numerical value and the energising power to which their apparent strength is so disproportionate— their patience, perseverance, and adaptable habits — their ability to prepare and make ready for subsequent effort and more ostentatious labour.

Looked at abstractly, what a "glorious phalanx" they are; looked at concretely, what an infinitude of quiet work they have accomplished. Leave them out of the world's history, and how much would have been either left undone or done far less efficiently. The old maids of Bethany have pointed more morals than could be imagined since Anno Domini began,— the memory of the Maid of Orleans and Charlotte of Corday will live as long as heroism itself,— and in all countries there always have been, and will be, those who in single blessedness have found a better thing than mere happiness.

Not always, however, is their celibacy self-sought. By an inexorable law there are millions of women who can never marry, simply because the supply is greater than the demand; and the world has reason to be thankful for the fact, inasmuch as so much more easily pleased are men than women, that they ask far less in marriage than does a woman in the way of sterling, Hard-wearing qualities. Physical comeliness goes farther

with most men than moral or intellectual worth, and as a natural consequence the best and most useful of the female sex are frequently found among the ranks of the unmarried.

There is one class of Old Maid— possibly a larger one than would appear at first sight— upon which we have not hitherto touched; the saddened souls, predestined as it seems to solitariness, who from hereditary taint of insanity or disease are debarred from matrimony.

The world holds its peace too often with regard to mental and physical disabilities, but they exist in every community. There are thousands of "dream children" peopling the world, and medical men know many sad tales in which the sweet joys of possible parenthood have been surrendered from an overwhelming sense of duty to generations yet unborn. In this connection the name of Mary Lamb rises irresistibly to our thoughts.

It is improbable that one of whom we read that she was for long intervals regarded as the "guardian angel" of every dwelling where she and her faithful brother took up their abode, should have passed her life untouched by the solicitudes of love. The recuperative powers of her brain were so great that his heroic self-sacrifice seemed as nothing to him compared with the pleasures which her society afforded in her healthful days; and the fascination which she

exerted over him was in all likelihood felt by one or other of his friends. It adds but little, however, to the pathos of her story if we imagine this to have been the case.

"Nobly planned" was Mary Lamb— a friend whose faithfulness knew no shadow of turning, a woman with whom Coleridge and Wordsworth, Landor and Hazlitt, delighted to converse, but in whose veins ran the fatal strain of an inherited insanity, and whose most sunshiny days were dimmed with the possibility of a premature darkness.

Of what she did in literature we are still in possession. The 'Tales from Shakespeare' have lived for nearly a hundred years, are still classics, and will doubtless remain so. As an introduction to Shakespeare for the young they are inimitably valuable, though in her simple Preface she modestly speaks of them as "faint and imperfect images," giving but a "few hints and little foretastes of the great pleasure which awaits them in their elder years."

Their success at the time of publication was decisive and immediate, and up to the present day new editions have been repeatedly called for, It remains to be seen whether the twentieth century will produce anything which in directness and fulfilment of purpose shall supersede these paraphrases of Shakespeare's immortal tragedies.

'Mrs Leicester's School' was the next literary work upon which Mary Lamb engaged herself; and though never so popular as the 'Tales,' it was considered by Coleridge to be "a rich jewel in the treasury of our permanent English literature."

The "tenderness of feeling and delicacy of taste" of which he speaks were distinguishing traits in her character; and Landor is no less enthusiastic in praising the charming naturalness which marked the style of the woman whom he described as the "finest genius" of her sex.

Writing to Charles of the sudden frenzy which resulted in the fatal attack of Mary Lamb upon her mother, Coleridge ends his letter thus,— and perhaps nothing in literature is more touching than the words with which he strove to mitigate to his friend the bitterness of the awful tragedy enacted in the room at Little Queen Street:—

"It is sweet to be aroused from a frightful dream by the songs of birds and the gladsome rays of the morning. Oh, how infinitely more sweet to be awakened from the blackness and amazement of a sudden horror by the glories of God manifest and the hallelujahs of angels."

Scarred past all reparation was that brother's sensitive heart, as is a fair landscape by some grim earthquake; but as in the chasm-clefts birds and beasts find refuge, and flowers wave lovingly

in the waste places, so new beauties — dearly bought indeed — developed in his nature, which might have lain dormant had all gone well in the modest household. "A deep distress had humanised his soul."

Rough and thorny was the path which he followed. Beset with troubles from without and from within was his life-work, but he never flinched or faltered in his self-imposed duty until his brave whimsical soul went up to God.

Never parted save during the sad periods when the asylum sheltered her irresponsible body, their mutual love sanctified their humble surroundings through every phase of sunshine and shadow; and there is an unutterable sadness in his simple words, "Tis a tedious cut out of a life of fifty-four to lose twelve or thirteen weeks every year or two."

So much has been said upon the subject of hereditary insanity that it would be worse than useless to recapitulate the various theories that have been put forward; but there can be no reasonable doubt that the early associations and stoical indifference which surrounded the early childhood of Mary Lamb were all against her. It is frightful to think of a child being practically taunted with such words as, "Polly, what are those poor crazy moythered brains of yours thinking of always?"— almost an incentive, one

might imagine, to vague inconsequent thinkings and doings.

The wonder is that the intellectual force and vitality of that mysteriously poised brain were sufficient to reassert themselves for long intervals over the ghastly heritage of an enfeebled development.

Everything was against her, and yet she was not only the charge but the guardian of her better known and well beloved brother. After his death, in 1834, she lingered in a dreamy twilight of mental and physical weakness for thirteen years, blessedly oblivious of the loss which she had sustained, and only woke to the full consciousness of living when she entered that heaven which, as "A Country Parson" so sweetly surmises, "may be a place for those who have failed on earth."

The whole story of the Lambs is matchless in pathos, and the alternate brilliancy and eclipsing of her mental faculties is one of those mysteries which we rejoice to think will be unriddled by-and-by.

No novelist, probably, has a keener insight into human nature than George Eliot, and her words about Mr Gilfil are no less true as regards many an old maid: "It is with men as with trees; if you lop off their finest branches into which they were pouring their young life juice, the wounds

will be healed over with some rough boss, some odd excrescence, and what might have been a grand tree, expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical misshapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty."

There is many a tear shed in secret over letters discoloured by age; many a nook consecrated by old memories and hopes destined to disappointment; many a lonely, loveless life because one is not, whose coming "made summer in the house," and whose defection or departure has made the days drag heavily for evermore. These things will always be as long as the sun and moon endureth,

as long as men and women live out their little earthly life, as long as human nature and human frailty coexist

Constitutionally women are more susceptible to their surroundings than men, and, therefore, are the more worthy of honour when, in spite of the hampering restrictions of sex, they have proved themselves capable not only of lightening the pain and anguish of humanity, but of enlightening the complex problems of this complex world.

The phrase *cherchez la femme* has a wider significance than is generally given to it. There is much that only a woman could do — still more

that only a single woman could do. They have *time,* these worthy women, which is not at the command of those whose more encircled lives include the care of husband and children and home—time to contemplate, to organise, and to devote.

Their duties are less definite than those of a matron, their ties less binding; but the lives of many are sublime with self-surrender, and it will take Eternity to show the wonders they have wrought.

No one would adopt the absurdity of crediting all the good work of the world to any special class or condition; but looked at with dispassionate eyes, it is almost a truism that some of the world's best work has been done by those who, with singleness of heart and aim, have been able to devote themselves to it.

Very rarely does a woman pose as an obstructionist—her failing is rather on the side of aggressive progression; and the "perpetual motion" inevitably connected with her prevents anything like stagnation, and makes life a better, sweeter, and grander thing.

"For the holiest deeds that are ever done
Are in the form of surprises,
And the heart that is ready for angel tasks
A plan for its work devises."

Now and for ever is the stigma removed from the "Old Maid." It is no longer an epithet of

reproach; and the temple not made with hands, the dome of which is world-wide and eternal, has in it no more honoured riches than those which are filled and glorified by such women as those whose life and work we have endeavoured to describe.

APPENDIX