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Graduating Thesis

Should Cooking and Sewing be Taught in Our Public Schools.

by

Etta Ridemour
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Books Consulted.
Educational Reports of Kansas.
March Review of Reviews, 1874.
Report of Committee on sewing and cooking
in Boston schools.
It has been said that "The aim of education for the boy in America is to make of him a free, self-directing man; a man ready and able to act intelligently, nobly, and strongly in all affairs of life. A man who while taking full account of the world in which he acts, does not find the principles or sanction of his action there, but in his own rightous will that is his education will include mainly those sciences which relate to man and his relation to the world of nature and the world of spirit."

If this is true of the boy's education, is it not also true of the girls? Her education should consist of those sciences which relate to woman and her relation to the world.

This question though long neglected is now confronting the public, and in many places it is inciting with in the people an enthusiasm which will result in the establishment of cooking and sewing in our public schools. Should this be done?
The Public school is the bulwark of a nation. It is here that the young mind begins an education, which if rightly directed will make a useful citizen in the world. It is here that the stones are selected, and the foundations of a future life are begun. If it is necessary that this foundation be laid with the principles of reading, writing, and spelling, how much more necessary is it that cooking and sewing should form the same stones? No girl can truly say that her education is finished until she has a thorough knowledge of cooking and sewing.

Of course many will say that the home is the place for the girl to master these tasks, but so many of the mothers think that the work can be done better, quicker, and easier by doing it themselves than by teaching the girl? Where then shall the begin? The answer is in the Public School. In the schools that have adopted this work they begin in the grammar
Four hours of the week may be spent in this work, two in cooking and two in sewing. In sewing attention is given first to simple, plain work and this is given up for harder work as they advance. The child is expected to bring work from home, but in case she does not, the instructor is expected to have one hand, some article on which she may work.

In the Boston School, patching and darning were first given particular attention. The result proved so satisfactory that a proposal made to teach the girls the art of cutting and fitting their own dresses was met with approval.

Another evidence of the satisfaction gained from this work is seen in the cooking school held in connection with the Farmer's Institute at Monroe, Wisconsin. Everything was prepared with such delicacy and taste that no one could deny the sentiments expressed by a certain person who said that...
'A good cook was the noblest work of God,' and that he would like to see a cooking school attached to every county school system.

There is nothing that brings the mental condition of man up to a good high standard like good cooking.

The success of this work in the Boston Schools, Washington, and others is enough to encourage the establishment of such in all Public Schools, and it seems to me that no one can question the appropriateness of placing this as one of the main features of a girl's education.

One woman has said, 'none other would have such influence in developing a woman's faculties and dexterity in the direction of manual employment; none other is so intimately associated with her needs, her nature, and her character.'

The statement, 'a girl is known by her dress,' is surely a very true one; for no matter how bright the girl may be, how pretty or model she
may appear, an ill-fitting, untidy dress will spoil the good effect. She
cannot fill an influential portion and possess such qualities.
In the Public School she would be taught to select the right kind of
material for her dress, and of a price corresponding to her means, to make
it well and keep it neat and clean. She is thus enabled to keep her brother
and sisters' clothes in repair; that in place of ragged, tattered clothes, we
might see well patched garments.
Poor sewing. However it is not the only fault we can find with so many of
our housekeepers of to day. But they are poor cooks, one of the worst qualities
a woman can possess. Thanks to the untiring efforts of a few, this is
being introduced into the Public schools
and before many years shall have
passed away, we will have good cooks
to beautify our homes.
This is begun in the grammar school and should be taught with
well illustrated lectures.
In the Boston schools the girls furnish the material and the result of their labor can be taken home, and in this way their parents may see what they are doing. Each girl is provided with a flaxen white apron and cap, and it is surely a pleasant sight to watch them as they busy themselves about their allotted tasks. Of course the teacher must be sufficiently clear for the beginner.

A knowledge of the physiology, chemistry, and philosophy of food is necessary. As a definition of cooking I will give Ruskin's as it expresses all that a definition can express. He says: "Cooking means the knowledge of Medea and of Circe, and of Calypso, and of the queen of Sheba. It means the knowledge of all herbs, and fruits, and balsams and spices, and of all that is healing and sweet in fields and groves, and savory in meats; it means carefulness and inventiveness, and watchfulness and willingness, and readiness of appliances."
It means the economy of your great-grandmother, and the science of modern chemists; it means much tasting and no wasting; it means English thoroughness and French art, and Arabian hospitality, and it means in fine that you are to be perfectly and always "ladies-loafers" and, as you are to see imperatively that any body has something pretty to wear, so you are to see, yet more imperatively, that any body has something nice to eat." This definition surely expresses the requisites of a good cook.

Many of our young married women have not the slightest idea of how to prepare just enough for two, and of course this results in wastefulness. Could they have had the advantage of taking this course in the Public Schools, they would have gained the desired knowledge and thus learned to economize. They would have been taught when to use hot or cold, soft or hard water.
for boiling, matters which seem small in themselves, and yet to the household ought to be of much importance.

Sir Henry Cole was one of the first advocates of cooking schools, and although laughed at for his views, we now see the result and realize the benefits of his untiring efforts.

In Wales the advancement of cooking schools is very great, and last year, in one of the back districts of northern Scotland, they were carrying in to the school house a cooking stove, that the work might be begun.

The knowledge the girls gain at school is put into effect at home. They are kept clean, and they are enabled to prepare their food in the most appetizing way.

They are taught the relation of food, how one kind may take the place of another, why and in what way one class of food is better than another. In our land, as a result of poor cooking, dyspepsia prevails.
and not until the wife can place before her husband and family, will cooked, palatable food will dyspepsia be eradicated.

The sanctity of the home is centered about the kitchen stove. Here the health and happiness of humanity lies in the most important State.

One person has said, "So great is the advantage, socially and physiologically, to be derived from this source, that if they were in no way educational, I would still lay this as a duty on the schools to train any girl within our borders, in these all essential domestic arts. If at Horace Mann says, it is a crime for a girl to grow up in ignorance of reading and writing, what sort of offence is it to fail to teach for a girl to grow up in ignorance of cooking and sewing. Think from what kind of hands tens of thousands of our children in the Public School, come each morning, rooms disorderly and ill kept, amid foul surroundings, presided
our by a mother, who can not decently patch or darn a garment, that it
beginning to give away, and who
knows only enough of cooking to take
the perhaps abundant material supplied
her, and render it by dirty, wasteful
processes, into disagreeable, and
indigestible messes, products of
dyspepsia, and scorbuta, and produce
of a craving for strong drink. As a
more matter of public safety can
we afford to breed such a population
in this Republic?

This ought to be the sentiments of
any true citizen.

The upbuilding of good citizenship
depends upon it, and it either promotes
or detests order, as we will it the comfort
and decency of our homes.

You say that in taking up cooking
and sewing in the public school the
girl will neglect her other studies,
but in this you are very much
mistaken. She is here securing an
intellectual and industrial education
which, combined, make her stronger.
morally and mentally. Is this not
truly a practical education? An education
which inspires her with dignity and
earnest womanhood in the cares of
everyday life. Homes made and kept
by such as she are the surest safe
guards of nation. They are the
main elements in the growth and
culture of society.

A few years ago domestic work
was considered degrading. A girl
would rather starve than do house
work, but public opinion is removing
this idea to some extent. Yet today
we hear our college graduates say I
must teach; but they very seldom
speak of work in the domestic
arts. This is not right. Our school
are now full and over-flowing with
teachers, and besides, many are not
of a suitable disposition for school
teaching. It is any public work
rather than domestic. This is wrong,
and not until the child is taught
from her babyhood, to love and
cherish the home work, to consider it
the grandest work of woman will this sentiment be changed.
This can be done by introducing cooking and sewing in the Public Schools. There will then be a gain in prosperity, health, temperance, and domestic happiness.

"The American mechanic, it is said, owed his position, as leader of the world, to the fact of his readiness to change old ways for new and better ones:

Is it not time the American people were following his example and awakening to a finer appreciation of Domestic Art?"