

Modern Tendencies in the Higher Education of Young Women.

by

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The higher education of women in America is now in progress on a vast scale, and in a variety of ways. Every phase of this great experiment, we choose to call it, may be studied almost simultaneously. Women are taking advantage of all the various kinds of education offered them and, considering the short period of time that this education has been offered them, about thirty years, we see how eager they are for education. Butler says in his essay on Education for Women, "The higher education of women naturally divides itself into, college education designed primarily to train the mental faculties by means of a liberal education and, secondarily to equip the student for self support and professional or special education, directed primarily toward one of the money making occupations."

What is meant by higher education? It is the long course of education which the most thoroughly trained young American can get, a course which covers about twenty years between the sixth and the twenty sixth or twenty seventh years. The higher education is that which he receives after he is eighteen or nineteen years of age, that which he receives in the college or university after common school life is ended, and usually after his home life with his parents is over. It ordinarily covers three or four years of instruction in what are called the liberal arts or sciences, and after that period, a professional training which requires both special learning and special skill. The higher education thus covers a period of six to seven years.

"The history of the education of a people, or an age is the history of its civilization, of its intellectual, moral and religious life, its material progress being incidental and subordinate."

Higher education is not alone preparation of great people for



great things. Higher education may prepare little men for greater things than they would have otherwise found possible, and so it is with women.

The best education for an individual is the one which will enable him best to realize his highest possibilities, that which will make him the highest type of human being that he can become. "Mere information is not education, learning is not power."

Before going farther, I must say that health is very essential to education, feeling gives tone to thought, sets the intellect to work to find a language having its own intensity to pile up lofty and impressive circumstances; thus it gives the poet and orator, "The thoughts that breathe and words that burn," to cultivate the emotional nature in accordance with its own laws, and in the right direction is the great educational problem. The emotional holds to the intellectual the relation which the sun holds to the moon.

Mere learning and even skill are without value in life unless they are controlled and directed by the "Old Reliable Trust Company," Common sense, Honest purpose, Broad experience, & Co., Mere learning is autocratic and is apt to antagonize true purpose.

A short history of education for women might give us an insight into the work that has been done. In 1862 Miss Garrett, then working with the aim of obtaining a medical qualification, asked at the University of London to open their degrees to women. Her application was refused on legal grounds, but a short time later her father again brought the subject before the senate of the University, begging for a reconsideration of his daughter's application and suggesting that a clause should be added to the charter of the University providing for the admission of women to its examinations and degrees.

There was a committee appointed in 1862, of which Miss Davies



was the leader, to try to get the schools opened for examinations for women. The next year a memorial signed by more than one thousand teachers of girls and many other influential persons was addressed to the vice chancellor of the University on the subject of opening the local examinations to girls. The reply was favorable but the matter had to be referred being a very close vote, fifty five to fifty one in favor of those for the bill. This was at Cambridge and a short time afterward Oxford opened her local examinations also. It might be noted here that exactly the same examination papers were used for both boys and girls and exactly the same regulations were observed for both, except in the case of Cambridge where the names of the girls examined were not given at first.

In 1869 after Miss Davies was successful in the first work she began to project the idea of a college for women, beyond the school age, where they could be prepared for University examinations of a more advanced character. She was also successful in this. There was a college established at Hitchen, about half way between London and Cambridge. Up to 1878 no college had allowed women to the medical examinations, but now London University opens its doors to them. In 1880 a bill was sent to the senate asking that women be allowed to take these degrees, if they were as capable as the men. In 1881 it passed the senate. From that time on, women had an assured position in the University. Their claim to education was formally sanctioned. The success of the whole movement has from one point of view been very remarkable. The high place gained by women students in the various tripos examinations is so well known as to require no emphasis. When one reflects that the whole of this movement has grown up within the scope of one lifetime, almost within one generation, I think we women can fairly congratulate



ourselves on the progress that has been made.

The opening of colleges to women was at first spoken of as an experiment, and we find the experiment has been thoroughly successful. Men and women sit together in the same class rooms, learn the same subjects, are tested by the same examinations, and the world has gone on much the same as it did before, only better by giving men and women more points of sympathy and a larger number of common interests. Education seems to be a human need and a human right.

Women are by nature intended for people of business. They are called to it by the equal balance of their powers and their keen sense of observation. Women require as high an education as men. Women themselves must be permitted to be the judges of what kind of intellectual discipline they find most truly serviceable. They seem to have made up their minds and hereafter may be trusted to see to it that an inferior education shall not be offered to them in women's colleges, or elsewhere, under the name of a modified curriculum. There was a time when common opinion held that women should not be educated at all. The number of women is small who have passed their school days and are without regular employment. It is a very small percentage whether married or single who are not wholly self-supporting and no one need look far to find those who have the burdens of others to bear. And yet while woman is so generally a bread winner, she rarely commands as large a compensation for her services as her brother, even when engaged in the same vocation. Custom is admitting her to a much larger number of employments than would receive her a generation ago; or even less time. Would it be more womanly if she were to supervise the work of the school, instead of filling the inferior position of assistant teacher? If her scientific knowledge were so thorough that she could be the assagen



or the practical chemist instead of simply assisting in the office as a copyist or correspondent? If instead of standing in the printer's case and setting type, she were able to fill the position of foreman in the job room?

What is our present idea of the higher education of young women? That education is intellectually higher for girls and women as a class than that of a century ago no one will deny. True, there were talented and remarkable women then, but these were the exception not the rule. But when the house-wifely talents of each period are considered, there seems to be some falling off in this respect, in the latter one. The tendency of the former period was to produce "notable house wives," that of the latter is to give us women doctors, lawyers, speakers, writers, and generally well educated women, but women who have little or no knowledge of household affairs. Girls, while busy in school have no time to learn housework. By far the greater number of teachers in the country are women. The education of the masses is practically intrusted to women. In journalism, in literature, women are fully as active as men. In fact there is no field today in which intellect counts where woman is not holding her own with man.

Why should one be educated when he does not intend to depend upon it for a maintenance? An education is necessary for happiness. It teaches us the proper care of the body thus insuring health. One can not appear in society without an education and I might enumerate one reason after another which we all know to be true. Why should a father educate his son when he himself never possessed or knew or found the want of it in the acquisition of his wealth? For the reason that a generation has passed, and he has seen the need of education to successfully manage business. As the world advances



each individual is required to advance in proportion. This applies as well to the young women.

One great end of education is to enable people to live over again thought lives, and experiences of others as recorded in our civilization. But this can be done only by giving them a certain culture of experience along practical lines.

There is now a great enthusiasm for education. The reason for this is first, the democratic constitution of the country. "The state depends on the common education of the people as the only cause of that unity of ideas necessary to its continual existence."

Statistics show a very great increase in colleges that will admit women, and there is every reason to suppose that this increase will continue. Already, girls constitute fifty six and five tenths percent of the pupils in all secondary schools. Thirteen percent of the girls enrolled and only ten percent of the boys enrolled, graduate from the public high schools.

A German writes, "Of all points of social advance in my country, at least during the last generation, none is more marked than the change in the position of women. In respect of rights of property, of education, of access to new callings, as for the improvement of material well-being and its diffusion among those whose labor is a prime factor in its creation."

Are women better or worse for the wider opening of the gates of knowledge to them? Is it better for them, is it better for the common wealth? The answer depends on our faith in women. Has not the movement led to higher education? It has aided not only in the mental but also in the moral life. It has not only helped the individual but the whole commonwealth. There was a time not many years ago when it was considered indelicate for women to study certain



subjects that are now considered very important. Our girls are healthier in body and in mind, happier, more useful, more truly womanly, than those whose whole nature was less fully developed. Besides, a woman with wider intellectual interests is more helpful in every way. Is it well that mother and son or brother and sister should live in such different realms?

Every year the number increases of young women seeking educational work of a higher kind than had hitherto been offered or asked for.

"The world which credits what is done

Is blind to all that might have been."

Do you ask, are all these aims of higher education anywhere attained? Nowhere as yet, but they surely will be as our republic grows in wealth, wisdom, and true wealth.

The passionate desire of women of this generation for higher education was attained throughout its course by the extreme doubt felt by women themselves as well as by men as to it. Now we know that women, like men, are quickened and inspired by the same study of the great traditions of their race, by the same love of learning, the same love of science, the same love of abstract truth. That women, like men, are immeasurably benefited, physically, mentally, and morally, and are made vastly better women and men by it. Year after year colleges report fewer absences and fewer conditions incurred by women than by men in the same classes. The success of women in college work is producing a curious situation in men's education which is beginning to make itself felt in co-educational colleges. We are now living in the midst of great social changes which are preparing the way for the coming economic independence of women of this generation. A college education seems as we study it now in the light of coming events to have been a part of this great



movement. In order to prepare for this economic independence we should expect to see what is now taking place. Colleges for women and college departments of co-educational universities are attended by ever increasing numbers of women students. A liberal college course prepares women for their great profession of teaching. College women have proved to be such admirably efficient teachers that they are driving other women out of the field. Until other means of self support are as easy for women as teaching, more and more who intend to teach will go to college.

Women's college education has succeeded too well to please some of the men of eastern colleges - that is the whole truth. No institution which has begun to educate women has yet thought of giving up the responsibility. Instead each year more colleges for men are assuming fresh responsibilities towards women. Undoubtedly the form of women's college education may change somewhat. The main thing we are concerned with is to get these thousands of women educated by any method at all. And just because women have shown such an aptitude for a true college education and such delight in it, we must be careful to maintain it for them in its integrity. We must see to it that its disciplinary quality is not lowered by the insertion of so called practical courses which are falsely supposed to prepare for life. Women are rapidly coming to control women's college education.

If women are to support themselves even as generally as they do now (and there will undoubtedly be many more self-supporting women in the immediate future,) they must find entrance into the professions and into various kinds of business activity. Their education must be at least as varied and open to modifications as men's education. But the indications of successive educations of the census in all



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civilized countries and many other signs of the times, make us sure that in two or three generations, practically all women will either support themselves or engage in some form of civic activity. Many more women will go on with advanced work if they can go on at the college where they have taken undergraduate work. The experience of men's colleges has proven this.

Therefore it seems to me to rest with us, the college women of this generation, to see to it that the girls of the next generation are given favorable conditions for the higher kind of scholarly development.

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