

The Education of Woman in the 19th Century

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Outline.

I Woman's education in the past.

- (a) Facilities for education.
- (b) Objections raised against her education.
 - (1) It is lost if she marries.
 - (2) The effect on her character.
 - (3) Physical results.

II. First steps in higher education.

- (a) The schools established by the Pilgrims.
- (b) Boston Girls' High School.
- (c) Girls' Colleges.
- (d) Concessions of Harvard and Yale.

III Present Conditions.

- (a) Compared with the past.
- (b) Faults of present system.
 - (1) The length of time given.
 - (2) Instructors.

IV. Results

- (a) Intellectual.
 - (1) Comparison with attainments of men.
 - (2) Comparison with those of former women.
 - (3) Better employment and salaries.
- (b) Industrial results.
- (c) Social results.

In all that through years past has given us our art, science, and literature, woman has had her place. Deborah, a judge, Sappho, a poet whose fame rivaled that of Homer, and Cleopatra, a woman learned in language and a ruler of one of the leading nations of her time, show that, before the Christian era, woman had won recognition in pursuits to which even in this advanced age, some forbid her entrance. In the fifth century Hypatia was a successful lawyer, mathematician, and philosopher. Caroline Herschel's work in establishing the science of astronomy, deserves an equal place with that of her brother William. Botany and entomology owe much to the patient and persistent work of Maria Elizabeth Humboldt.

These in their times were, however regarded exceptions, and as a class women were not worthy subjects for an education. Educational privileges were denied her and public sentiment was strongly against any concessions to the ambitious girl student. A little less than three hundred years ago a young woman of France proposed a school for girls and in answer was hooted through

the streets while her father called a number of eminent physicians, thinking she must be possessed by devils. Every appeal for the better education of women has like this one, seemed preposterous when first suggested. It has been only by the devotion and self sacrifice of many noble men and women, who have dared oppose a public sentiment, the growth of ages, and have given their lives and their fortunes to the work, that we may now enjoy the free schools to which we owe so much.

In our own country during the colonial period the few schools, established for girls taught only sewing and reading. In 1788 one town voted "not to be at any expense for schooling girls." Four years later that law was repealed and girls from eight to fifteen could attend the town school from May to August. In 1790 Boston allowed girls to attend the summer school and to be instructed by the teacher in case there were not enough boys to occupy his whole time.

Nearly two hundred years elapsed between the establishment of Harvard

College for men and the first school for the higher education of women. There were six great colleges established for men before any provision was made for women. The first step in advance was made when girls were admitted to the academies that prepared for college. This helped matters a little but there were still many things to be improved. The course offered by these academies was too limited and led to nothing beyond them. There was felt great need for the advanced study given in the colleges for boys. The arguments presented against this were many. They said that (1) a woman did not need the education of a man, (2) that she had not the ability to acquire it, (3) that its physical and moral effects would be disastrous, and (4) that time and money spent in this way would be wasted, if she married which she was of course expected to do. The first two objections do not now receive much attention. The fears entertained as to its evil results have been shown

by experiment to be groundless. The large number of girls, who, with unimpaired health, have completed courses at college, proves that it can be done. The last objection given, that the time and expense of educating girls are wasted, is still presented by many. An education given to a boy is equivalent to a fortune, while the same given to a girl is often thrown away as far as remunerative results are concerned. Unless a woman who receives a professional education devotes her life to its use, time and money are at least partially lost. For this reason many people of moderate means feel that most of this should be given to the education of their boys and are satisfied with a superficial and ornamental education for their girls. In spite of these objections it must be acknowledged that an all round education, that aims at mental development rather than commercial values, can but be a benefit to the person receiving it and to all with

whom she may come in contact. The right of every human being to know, and the right of all to strive for the highest possible perfection have to a great extent been acknowledged. From Plato we read, "Is there anything better in a state than that both women and men should be rendered the very best? There is not."

The school established by Mrs. Emma Willard in 1821, at Troy, New York was probably the first school, exclusively for girls, in this country. In 1826 Boston established a girls High School, as an experiment. So many sought admission, that accommodations were found wholly insufficient. Whereupon instead of enlarging facilities the wise men of the day closed the school. Their verdict upon the dead institution was not, died of uselessness but of a popularity surpassing its possibilities. At least three schools, similar to that of Mrs. Willard, were established in New England before 1833 when Rev. H. H. Kellogg realized that there was no endowed institution for girls and

formed a plan for one combining with intellectual work some practice in domestic duties. The school was designed to give a good home and an education to women at a cost no greater than that of men's colleges. Miss Mary Lyon took up the work with a ready heart and hand and after much difficulty raised about \$50,000 to establish her school at South Hadley. The first walls fell, but not discouraged by this, the building was completed. On Nov. 8, 1837, Mt. Holyoke was opened to a large number of earnest and enthusiastic students.

On these foundations laid from 1826 to 1833 there have arisen numbers of well equipped institutions, having a high and constantly advancing standard of scholarship. Vassar, Wellesley, Smith and Bryn Mawr have gained a reputation as great for their work as Harvard and Yale have won in theirs, while these latter institutions have so far recognized the character of the work done by woman as to admit her in a large measure to the same instruction given men.

The present schools give to women of all classes educational advantages, for which, at the close of the last century, even the most favored in talent and fortune could not have hoped. Surely during the early years of the great incoming twentieth century, when men and women alike, join in the pursuit of knowledge, and in toiling for its diffusion, there will be such a revival of learning as the past has never known.

There is one serious disadvantage under which women now labor, found in the fact that they are expected to finish their school life at an earlier age than do men, while the studies required, including music drawing, and other accomplishments, should occupy even more time. This makes it necessary that they should either work harder or be more superficial. They can hardly be expected to do more work than men and surely need as thorough a knowledge of their subjects. This leads to cramming and a girls education is measured by the number of facts she can remember rather than by her

mental development. One other fault that has existed in the past but is now largely overcome is a lack of the best instructors. Learning has been diffused among all classes of women till those of this country are as well educated as the men, if not better. A large number have become artists, writers, and teachers equal in ability and usefulness to men.

The contrast between this state of affairs and that only so remote as colonial times, when women eminent in society, signed their names with a cross, is too marked to need any illustration.

In all co-educational institutions women now hold honorable places and often lead their classes. In Cambridge women have sometimes taken the same examinations given men, and as a whole have ranked above them.

Advanced education has resulted in a great increase in the number of occupations open to women and in the salaries which they command. It is perhaps in these industrial changes that the wider education of woman has

attracted the most attention and with it the severest criticism. Mechanical inventions have made skill and intelligence, rather than physical strength, the chief factors in production and women have displaced men in very many employments which were once exclusively theirs. It is no longer a rare case where a woman supports in comfort herself and dependent family or friends, and does not thereby forfeit a place in the best society. It is often said that women work, not for necessary support, but for superfluities, and that they thus interfere with the employment of men who are seeking to support families. This objection is hardly valid as the same may be said of many men.

To woman rightly or wrongly falls the larger part of the duty of making and keeping the world true, sweet and beautiful, of furnishing lofty ideals and of inspiring others to their attainment, of ornamenting the home and of entertaining and amusing society. To the accomplishing of this work, present

educational advantages, with the resulting increase of culture and intelligence, must be almost indispensable.

Great as are the results of this advanced learning on society, they are more marked in the increased strength, beauty, and excellence of individual character. As between human beings and the lower animals, the chief distinction is in the aptitude of the former for progress, for culture, for education, so it is the highest realization of these possibilities that completes and crowns a kingly or a queenly life.

Granted that some, or even much, of college work, adds nothing to the so-called practical equipments of the student, to his ability to succeed in business, or in professional competition, yet to man and woman alike it surely brings an infinitely greater gift, in an enlarged personality and in the nearer attainment of the perfection of being.

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