

Necessity of Private Schools for Girls in Canada

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AS OUR country grows in population and wealth the problem of education becomes daily more important and more complicated. In former days it was not considered necessary that a girl should have an education in any way similar to that of her more fortunate brothers. They had to be fitted for the battle of life, while she was to remain guarded and cared for at home, busying herself in housewifely duties, a pleasant, graceful, and not too intellectual companion for her husband's leisure hours. For this a little reading, a little—in some cases very little—spelling, some smatterings of general knowledge, a little French or Italian sufficed. One branch of training, too much neglected in many modern homes, was indeed well carried out. The old-fashioned girl was neat, orderly, and dainty in all things pertaining to her person and the household. She kept the linen in wardrobe and chest carefully replenished. She was expected to be an adept in the art of concocting marvellous teas and cordials from herb and berry. Then she should play a few pieces on piano or harp, embroider useful and useless articles, walk elegantly, dance gracefully, enter and leave a room with ease and decorum. For these no elaborate system was thought necessary. A governess, a few masters, and perhaps a small finishing school for accomplishments and deportment fulfilled all the requirements.

Of course, in all ages there have been brilliant exceptions—scholars in Latin and Greek, learned philosophers, brilliant mathematicians. Everywhere and at all times aspiring minds find food to nourish them, and grow all the more robust, perhaps, through the effort of seeking. But the average mind rested satisfied with its surroundings.

But now conditions have changed, and we are forced to ask ourselves, "For what spheres must the modern girl be prepared, in Canada especially?" and "How best can she be fitted to undertake her new duties?"

A large number of our women live on farms and in country places. Their lives will be busy ones. How can ugliness be transformed into comfort and beauty, drudgery into fruitful and absorbing work? Much has been done already towards this, and much more may still be done in the near future. Our public schools give to all an opportunity for learning to read fluently and intelligently, to write correctly, to compute readily. All that can be done to train the girl in neat sewing and plain cooking should be encouraged. Nature study also which trains the eye to careful observation and awakens a love for that which is beautiful, will teach them to find pleasure in the common things about them. Furthermore, our agricultural and domestic science schools are doing much to introduce scientific methods into dairy work and poultry farming, and to make cooking and laundry work a pride and a pleasure rather than necessary evils.

Then we have a large class of girls who must support themselves, in part or altogether, in our larger towns, as clerks, bookkeepers, stenographers, etc. Having given what time they can afford to their general education in public and high schools, they continue their special training in business colleges or technical schools. They are fortunate, indeed, if their early teaching has been such as to awaken in them a taste for good literature and an interest in some subject which will claim their thoughts when working hours are over. Women who desire to enter into professions, such as teaching, law, or medicine, have exactly the same opportunities for doing so as have men. Universities, law schools, medical schools are all open to them. That the education best fitted to develop a man's power is necessarily the best for a woman, I do not wish to assert; at least we are permitted to watch the experiment.



But the girls of whom I wish particularly to speak to-day are not those who by force of circumstances or by a spirit of independence have been driven into competition with men in the battle of life. Many of our girls look forward to a life where home and social duties only await them, when, as they would say, their education is finished. On them depends, in a great measure, the standard of culture, manners and morals which is to prevail throughout the country. Give them broad and enlightened minds, the courteous manners that spring from a quick and ready sympathy, disciplined emotions and lofty ideals, and there is hope for advance in the coming generations.

It is for these girls chiefly that our private schools exist, and it should be possible, for many reasons, to develop in them a perfect system of education. In the first place, they are very little hampered by utilitarian considerations. It is not necessary to limit instruction to that which is directly useful. An ideal education should teach us how to live, not how to gain

a livelihood. It is not the acquisition of useful facts, nor is it merely a training of the memory, it is the drawing forth, the harmonious development of all one's powers, physical, mental, and moral, and spiritual. Education in any government system that provides for the masses must be a compromise between culture and commerce. This private schools should escape.

Again, time is not so limited. It is not necessary to try to force into nine years the work of twelve. A girl of seventeen who has passed her matriculation is not educated, is not ready to leave school. In fact, the ground has barely been prepared to nourish the flower of her education. She is not ripe enough to grasp unaided the thoughts of great minds, the trend of mighty movements. She may have learnt to write correctly, but rarely has her style developed individuality and force. Why should she not remain until her mind matures and unfolds naturally, doing work specially adapted to her individual requirements?

Another reason why a private school should—I do not say does—afford perfect opportunities for educational work is that parents ought to be willing to spend on their daughter's education a sum in just proportion to what they will spend later on her dress and pleasures.



It should be possible to have a large and very competent staff, sufficient for any demand that might be made upon it. It should be possible to have a complete and modern equipment in every branch of training that might be considered desirable. It should be possible to have spacious buildings and large grounds.

I have said that an ideal education is the harmonious development of all the powers, physical, mental and moral, or spiritual. How can this aim be accomplished in a school?

Until comparatively recently very little attention has been given to physical work as an important branch of education in girls' as well as in boys' schools. And yet personal experience proves that mind and body are very closely related and dependent on one another. It is true that in some cases, by sheer force of will, men physically weak have accomplished great intellectual feats. Pope was "an ugly, crooked little thing that asks questions," and yet he had the most brilliant wit of his day. Paul was weak of flesh, but the willingness of his spirit compelled not only body, but brain, to work in the service of his Master. Yet it must be admitted that in the ordinary individual weariness of body counteracts the force of will necessary for any sustained mental effort. And weariness of body can be almost banished by careful and scientific physical training. I should like to emphasize the words "careful" and "scientific," for violent and ill-advised gymnastics may do more harm than good. Every girl should be carefully examined, and whenever necessary special corrective exercises should be given. The training should be gradual, and every muscle should be equally exercised. It is extraordinary what a change can be effected in the physique of a girl in a short time, and, with health, come good spirits and mental energy.

Games are another great factor in moral as well as in physical training. Hockey and basket-ball are peculiarly fitted to develop quickness, good temper, unselfishness, and a sense of fair play and honor.

Closely allied to physical training, from an educational point of view, are the manual crafts, such as wood-carving, weaving, and I might add carpentering, book-binding, and metal work. I do not think that the more purely intellectual work should be sacrificed unduly to these at an early age, but their recreative power is most valuable, and habits of concentration and neatness can be learned from them in some cases where mental work has been unavailing.

Although I do not hold that the acquisition of useful information and the training of the memory and the logical faculty compose the whole of education, there is no doubt that they do play a most important part in it. The memory is most active in young children, and if intelligently cultivated then will prove a valuable asset in later life. The logical faculty is notoriously weak in women, and it is our duty to strengthen that feeble quality and gradually wipe out the stain on the reputation of our sex in this respect. And now we are left face to face with the question, What knowledge is the most useful for our girls to acquire?

I have said before that their duties will be mainly social. What knowledge, then, will best fit them for these duties? We live in a practical age in a practical country. Our men are for the most part too busy to occupy themselves much with ideas. And yet great ideas are the mainspring of all national greatness. Should not our women be trained to understand and appreciate the great ideas of great men of former ages?

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