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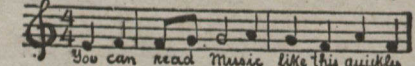


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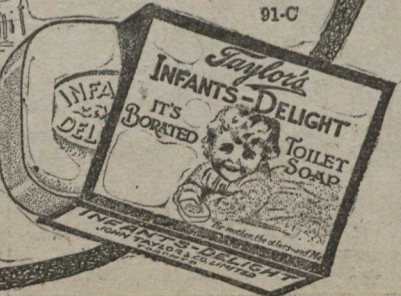
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THE COLLEGE GIRL

THE GIRL WHO LEARNS TO THINK AT COLLEGE

A Message to Undergraduates

By MARY E. LOWREY

THERE were six of us, gathered informally around a grate fire and enveloped in the pleasant calm that accompanies tea and knitting, when Caroline King, apropos of nothing whatever, remarked with sudden energy: "I wish I had college to live over again!" "Every one does," I said soothingly, filling her cup for the fourth time.

"I was talking to a little cousin of mine who is coming to college in the fall," went on Caroline, disregarding both interruption and tea, "and I asked her what course she intended to take, and she answered that she didn't know. I asked her what profession she wanted to be fitted for, and it had never occurred to her. So simply out of curiosity I inquired just why she was coming to college at all, and she said with a good deal of surprise, 'Why, I've grown up with the idea of going to college!'"

"And then I remembered," continued Caroline, "that I had gone through college in much the same hap-hazard fashion. Up to my third year I really hadn't any more practical idea of life beyond graduation than of life beyond the grave. I remember realizing quite suddenly one day at the end of my third year that very soon I should have to start to earn my own living, and resolving that whatever happened I should never teach school. And yet here I am! And I believe that ninety per cent. of the girls who go through college without a definite purpose drift into the teaching profession simply because there seems to be nothing else for it."

There was a little awkward silence; as a teacher, Caroline is frankly a misfit. Then Clara Ellis remarked:

"A man said to me the other day that there are just two kinds of college girl—the kind that comes to college solely for purposes of education, and the kind that comes solely for purposes of co-education."

"That isn't true," declared Margaret. "The fact is, as Caroline says, that most girls go to college simply because they have 'grown-up' with the idea of going. If college women were as definite in their aim from the beginning as college men, no doubt they would achieve bigger results than they are doing. But it's possible to take it too seriously. I remember that some of the girls who went through college with that awful intensity of purpose were a little trying at times. I think if I were advising your little cousin, I should tell her to make friends first of all, for she will never have the same opportunity again. The trouble is that a girl usually enters college at an age when she is most intolerant toward others, and most sensitive toward herself; most inclined, too, to take her prejudices seriously. Do you know, the biggest thing I learned at college was just how to like people!"

Most of us felt just then that Margaret's education had not been wasted; for her friendship is a privilege that somehow loses none of its preciousness for being widely granted. Most of us remembered, too, the days when she was an unapproachable little freshette who met every friendly overture with a kind of frigid shyness.

It was Clara Ellis who put in a word for System. Clara is a business woman, and the most orderly person I have ever known. She always speaks in figures—mathematical figures—and from her conversational methods, one feels somehow that her brains must be arranged in neat rows and not at all after the scrambled fashion of brains in general.

"What your cousin needs most, Caroline," she declared, "is, in the first place, a knowledge of the necessity of method in her work. Academic life is simply a systematized combination of four phases of life—mental, physical, social and spiritual—and the girl entering college is likely to live every one of them more intensely than she has ever done before. She must have a working system—a sort of time table of activities—if she is to develop herself continuously and symmetrically. Do you know the percentage?"

"Don't get statistical, Clara," pleaded Caroline. "Remember this is a tea party, not a board meeting."

"Clara is quite right," declared Margaret warmly; "she was the only one of us who wasn't taking caffeine nights in her last year, and who hadn't actually to crawl out of bed to graduate. It seems

to me that if there were less of that hit-or-miss spirit during college there would be fewer nervous collapses after it."

Nell Gardner, who teaches English in the High School, spoke for the first time.

"I gave my third form an essay to write on Sir Isaac Newton the other day," she said, "and six out of thirty began, 'Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravitation.' So, simply out of curiosity, I investigated and tracked the whole party to the Reference Library. I cancelled them all, gave out a subject they could use their imaginations on, and warned them that every sentence in it had to be original. And I wish," she added, "that my High School teacher had had enough sense to do the same."

"The fact is, I have the reference habit pretty badly myself," she went on. "I don't think I ever wrote an original, critical or thoughtful essay in my life. Whenever I had to form an opinion, I went to the Encyclopædia for it. If I were going through college again I should think for myself, no matter how crude the results might be, but when I try now I find myself in a sort of mental vacuum. This reference system is—dementing," she concluded indignantly—she had just dropped four stitches and was feeling a little bad tempered. "I don't consider Andrew Carnegie a public benefactor; he's the patron saint of the lazy-minded."

"BUT no one can afford to be independent of other people's ideas," objected Nan, who is a librarian. "Of course, if you let your reading take the place of your thinking, it is 'dementing.' But college is supposed to train one to read the things that stimulate to more thought, even if they don't amuse or even appeal to one. There isn't any royal road to real knowledge."

"In other words, if you want to know the unknowable, you must read the unreadable," suggested Caroline.

"I often think," Nan went on, "that when we go to college we become so absorbed in the process of being educated that we forget the object of it. We don't go there simply to attend a certain number of lectures, to read the prescribed texts and to pass examinations. We go to make ourselves accessible to ideas, to learn to think more widely and more tolerantly. It's one's attitude of mind and not one's class standing that is the final test of education."

"It's a pity," said Margaret reflectively, "that we take so long to acquire a real conception of college. At first it seems like a sort of sublimated high school. We don't realize that, while the object of the high school is simply to teach us, the object of the university is to teach us to teach ourselves."

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control," quoted Nell. "That's the basis of real education, because the whole of one's development depends on self-realization. The trouble with our present system is that it works backward. Self-realization comes as the result of education, when it should be the starting point."

Nell has very advanced ideas on the subject of education, and she knows more about child psychology than the man who invented the term. I have sometimes wondered what her pupils think of this efficient young woman, who charts every phase of their development and scrutinizes their helpless little mental processes with an eye that nothing can escape.

"Some one should write a book and dedicate it to undergraduates," said Margaret, after a pause.

"They wouldn't read it," Caroline declared cynically. "Undergrads never read anything they can avoid—unless it's illustrated by a namby-pamby artist."

Too often when a girl leaves college all thoughtful reading is dropped, as though her education were finished when, as a matter of fact, it is really only begun.

If she can think, she is in a position to reason out all those problems which must, sooner or later, confront her and which she must settle for herself. This ability to think—not only along the surface of things, with the superficial part of her mind—and to reason, carries with it the power to analyse, to distinguish between the true and the false, and to recognize and appreciate the true values of life.