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The Higher Education of Women

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THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

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THE question, as to whether women should have an opportunity for higher education given to them is now hardly a debatable one. Gradually the old-fashioned objections are disappearing in the light of practical experience. Intellectually women have shown themselves no mean opponents of their manly rivals. It may be true that women depart less from the normal than men, that they rarely, if ever, reach the highest intellectual peaks attained by the masculine intellect, yet their average capacity seems to be, if anything, higher than that of men, and it is the majority and not the exceptions who have to be considered. On the physical side they have proved that healthy mental activity is an antidote for many bodily ills and that keen many-sided interests banish that lassitude which called for fans and smelling-salts. The mannish woman also, that bug-bear of the older generation, is not often found within college walls. Rather is she more often the product of that country life where dogs, horses and sport of all kinds take the place of books and general culture. The hundreds of noble, cultivated, self-sacrificing gentlewomen who have passed from college into homes of their own, or into various spheres of public-spirited activity, are themselves the best advocates of the cause they represent.

But if the right to higher education is generally conceded, the form which that education is to take is still an open problem. The ulterior aim should surely be the same for men and for women. It is to make life richer, nobler, more divine. The senses should be awakened and stimulated to see and enjoy the highest beauty in nature and in art. The mind should be trained to seek truth, not only philosophically, but practically, until carelessness, inaccuracy, half-truths become distasteful, and honesty of purpose, thoroughness of

method and truth in expression, become second nature. And in this training of the senses and the mind, character is formed. This is the true preparation for life, and it is because this aim is so often forgotten and secondary objects put in its place that we find so much confusion and disagreement concerning courses of education for men and for women.

Yet secondary objects can not be entirely overlooked, as they are important factors in determining whether co-education, or a system of separate colleges for men and women, is the best method of providing for the highest good of both sexes.

Here it may perhaps be well to define these terms as I intend to use them. By co-education is meant a system by which men and women not only follow the same courses of study, but receive their instruction in the same place and at the same time. This system obtains in our own University in Toronto, at Cornell, Leland Stanford, and most of the State Universities in the United States, and, with certain modifications, at Oxford and Cambridge. Co-ordinate education means that men and women follow the same course of study but do not receive their instruction together (except, perhaps, in some minor courses). Radcliffe College, in connection with Harvard University, and Barnard College, in connection with Columbia University, represent this system. By separate Colleges we mean those which are entirely reserved for women, such as Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, Vassar, Smith; or for men, such as Yale (except for post-graduate work) and Johns Hopkins (with the exception of the Medical course).

If the mental qualifications of men and women are practically similar, if their physical endurance as regards brain-work is equally satisfactory, if the main object of education is the same for both, it seems natural that they should be educated together under exactly the same conditions. But in practice certain serious disadvantages have been noted. There is a tendency in this country, and perhaps elsewhere, in both men and women, to choose the courses of study which will be most directly useful to them in after-life. Men, for this reason, tend to desert the more humanistic branches, such

as Classics and Modern Languages, and to devote themselves to Political Economy, or to some science which will be of practical use to them in their professions. Women, on the other hand, prefer Modern Languages, Literature, and History, partly because they seem more adapted to the average feminine mind than Mathematics or Science, partly because they provide the general culture they desire, and partly because they are the subjects most open to them in the teaching profession. The result of this is that the few men who might wish to study Modern Languages are growing more and more reluctant to form a minority in mixed classes, and the same thing applies to the women to a certain extent. I believe in the University of Toronto at the present moment there are about 496 women students, of whom 405 are proceeding to a degree. Of these 127 are taking the General Course; 203 some Modern Language and History Course; 22 Household Science; 20 Classics; and the rest, some Scientific or Philosophical course. It is a curious fact, and one to which I shall have occasion to refer later, that in a separate College, such as Bryn Mawr, Latin and Economics are much more generally chosen than History or Modern Languages. This would point to the fact that co-education tends to narrow the intellectual scope of the students.

Many accusations have been brought against co-education as having a deteriorating influence on the morals, or perhaps one might say more truthfully, the manners of the gentler sex. It is held that constant intellectual competition with men develops the fighting instinct and makes women aggressive and self-assertive; that their occasional victories foster a spirit of pride and superiority not becoming to man's helpmeet; and that their consequent lack of gentleness and dependence is causing a corresponding lack of chivalry and courtesy in the attitude of men students towards them. I am inclined to think that this evil, if it exists, is due not to educational but to social causes. Intellectual competition between men and men, women and women, or men and women is stimulating, invigorating and productive only of mutual respect and admiration. Nor would I care to grant that intellectual supremacy is incompatible with all distinctively feminine virtues and charm. Too many countries can produce the names of

highly intellectual and cultured women of all ages who charmed and captivated not only by their intellectual brilliancy but by their grace and delicate wit. Old-fashioned intercourse between men and women was chiefly confined to drawing-rooms and more or less formal social festivities. This necessitated a conventional formality of manner, based, perhaps, on the old chivalrous idea of knighthood. As an expression of real respect and reverence it is what all true women would wish to see continued, but as a mere cloak and fashion it is somewhat of a mockery. Now that men and women meet naturally in almost every walk of life, it behooves women to look to it, that by elevation of mind, purity of soul, gentleness and true womanliness, they evoke in men the spirit of chivalry. The outward expression will then be of far greater value than any conventional courtesy. And this spirit of chivalry is, I believe, as strong in our men students here as it ever has been in any age or in any country. But unregulated social intercourse between men and women students does seem to be detrimental to the scholastic life of both. Students are, after all, only men and women, frequently only boys and girls, and they are apt to take an interest in one another's companionship which is not wholly intellectual. It is impossible to have two ruling passions at the same moment. Pallas is a jealous goddess. She will not share the homage of her devotees with Venus. She demands whole-hearted devotion, undivided interest, the sacrifice of many pleasures, many day-dreams. There are always lovers of wisdom of both sexes who, in spite of temptations, are able to subordinate social pleasures to their pursuit of knowledge. For these co-education has no dangers and many advantages. But, unfortunately, there is a frivolous, pleasure-loving element attracted to a co-educational college, not for the sake of learning, but for the sake of pleasure, of excitement, of social gaiety. These bring discredit upon a system which, rightly employed, might be a means of refinement and culture as well as of learning.

Chiefly in order to avoid these dangers many Colleges have sprung up which are entirely for women. They also have their disadvantages. The utilitarian tendency which threatens to relegate the humanities to an insignificant position and to deify the practical and mar-

ketable in men's education is also visible in special courses in Women's Colleges. It is too often forgotten that life is rich according to the diversity of interests which it contains, and that the highest function of education is not to teach a trade but to widen intellectual sympathies and at the same time to cultivate such clearness of vision, such soundness of judgment, such acuteness of perception, such interest in the problems of life, that whatever the daily task may henceforth be, it will be undertaken by a man or woman fully equipped to master its difficulties and to perform it in the light of broader issues.

Nor does a Separate College entirely solve the social difficulties. If it is good for men to be subjected to the softening influences of the companionship of women, if such intercourse subdues rowdyism and banishes coarseness and also affords training in the ordinary social amenities of life, it is also good for women to have some possibilities of contact with men. Where a Separate Women's College is completely isolated, its inmates are apt to acquire a rather narrow and artificial idea of life. A man's point of view, as a rule, differs somewhat from a woman's. He is apt to see the main issues and to overlook the detail. A woman frequently sees detail so clearly that the whole is obscured. It is well for each to see occasionally with the eyes of the other.

If then both co-education and Separate Colleges are beset with difficulties, intellectual and social, does any system of co-ordinate education promise better results? I am inclined to think that it is possible to combine the advantages of co-education and Separate Colleges and to avoid, to a great extent, their special difficulties.

In a Co-ordinate College the women have exactly the same intellectual advantages as the men. They follow the same courses, take the same examinations, and proceed to the same degrees. Their lectures, on the other hand, or at least the great majority of them, are held quite apart from the men's. There seem to be one or two advantages in this. The weaker brethren are, perhaps, more likely to give their undivided attention to the matter in hand if there is no other disturbing influence at work. Moreover, the slight apparent

tendency to avoid courses in which the opposite sex predominates would be removed. But what seems to me of much more vital importance from the woman's point of view, is that a Woman's College gives an opening for women as Professors, Lecturers, etc. Women can not only learn, they can also impart that learning to others. This has been proved in our own country, chiefly, I am sorry to say, in our schools rather than in our universities, and in many other countries where women have held honourable positions in colleges and have gained reputations for themselves, attracting not only women but men by their scholarship and brilliancy. The fact that such positions are open improves the scholarship of women and is a great inducement to them to continue their work in post-graduate courses. Moreover, the presence of women on the staff is of inestimable benefit to the women undergraduates. It brings them into close contact with mature, cultivated minds, capable of understanding their special difficulties and of giving them valuable advice. It also has a marked effect on the choice of courses. The presence of a brilliant mathematician, an able philosopher, an enthusiastic scientist, will open fresh vistas to the new student and encourage her to develop a taste which lies dormant through lack of stimulus. This, no doubt, accounts for the breadth of choice shown in such colleges as Bryn Mawr, and also for the fact that a large number of the students in Newnham and Girton, Cambridge, take the mathematical course. The bracing effect of competition with men is not withdrawn, although the personal element is largely eliminated. The test of examinations still proves the work of both, and to personal ambition is added a desire for the honour of the whole College.

Socially the advantages, especially from the woman's point of view, seem to be even greater than the intellectual ones. A strong, unified body is formed with a woman at its head. It is possible to so regulate the life of the student that social engagements are subordinated to intellectual pursuits. Power of initiation and organisation is more likely to be developed in societies where women are forced to depend on themselves and not on men. Yet, at the same time, within certain wise limits it is possible for men and women to come

into dignified and pleasant personal contact. Traditions grow up and that indefinable atmosphere, which is the expression of the strongest, wisest and best personalities that from time to time leave an indelible print on the life of the College, and which is called "college spirit."

But where a Women's College is formed on the basis of co-ordinate education it is absolutely necessary that it should be on a perfect equality in every respect with the men's colleges in the same university. Anything else would be a retrograde movement. An equal proportionate amount of money must be spent on its equipment and on providing its Faculty. It must be represented on a perfect equality on whatever may be the governing body of that university. Only thus will the best interests not only of women but of the whole community be adequately served.