THE COLLEGIATE EDUCATION OF GIRLS.*

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Some years since, I met, in travelling, an intelligent gentleman who was interested in the cause of education. It is good to get away from your native latitude, even if the pole star is lower. I listened with great interest to the expression of his views, which were based upon surroundings unlike my own. He enlarged upon the advantage to the country which would result from a great national university, and he described it in glowing colors. "I would have it cost," he said, "not tens of millions, but hundreds of millions." "For both boys and girls," I said quietly. He paused a minute, and then said, as if to himself, "Well,—I had not thought of the girls." And he had daughters only! Let us think of the girls.

WHOM SHALL WE HELP TO A COLLEGIATE EDUCATION?

Our colleges are, at present, adapted to what in England would be called the "upper middle class." Can we extend their opportunities to a larger number? We cannot put every girl through a college course. In the more enlightened States, elementary education is compulsory, and (theoretically) every child is taught to read and to write. To watch the public schools; to foster interest in the subject of education; to vote for the best persons, men or women, as guardians of these schools,—these are our duties to all classes, but more especially to the very poor, to whom no other schools can open. We cannot in this age make the public school a college, although it would be well if every State, like Massachusetts, gave to the few who intend to enter college the necessary instruction in preparatory studies. To my question, "Whom shall we help to collegiate education?" I should answer:—

First. Do not attempt to put the daughters of the very poor through a college course. It is barely possible that a rare genius may be found even among the unworthy poor, but the chance is so small that we shall waste time in looking for it. We cannot hurry the processes of nature. We may by rearrangements and modifications change the conditions into which we are born, but we cannot escape them. The tree of slowest growth is the family tree: if you examine that on one of whose branches some great name hangs, you will find that it had no mushroom growth, that its rings can be counted by hundreds.

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Second. I should say, also, Do not aid the sickly girl to enter college... Harm has already been done in this way. As in earlier days the feeble boy was trained for the pulpit, so there is to-day some tendency to send a sickly girl to college,—partly because our girls' colleges are governed by so good sanitary laws. I should dissuade the delicate girl from the attempt to take a regular college course. Let her study in the open air! Let her take a regular course of study in out-of-door practical sciences,—botany, geology, mineralogy. Let her exchange the crochet-needle for the needle of the surveyor's compass. The study of nature must be study with nature; if it requires one hour with books, this may be followed by two hours spent in hunting an insect in green fields, or in gathering shells from sea-washed rocks.

I should suppose that a summer science school for girls would be a good institution. Let a number of students club together, and establishing themselves in a healthy and unfashionable place, study its natural history. Such education would be fragmentary, but a little of science is as valuable for development as a little of the classics, or a little of mathematics; and the theory of to-day is, "Taste, even if you cannot drink deeply."

Knowing well-born, well-bred and healthy young girls who are prepared to enter college, and whose means are not quite adequate, let us help them. But the hand should not go to the pocket without some direction from the head. I say let us help them, for I deplore the rash impulse to take up one bright girl and carry her through a college course, by other means than those of her parents or relatives. We take her from the very struggle which she needs for her growth. She learns to expect to be held up, and she ceases to stand upright. I believe a girl loses her nicety in morals who looks around to see who is coming to her rescue! She owes, without a thought of payment.

Do not aid by founding prizes. You then add an artificial struggle to that which is healthy and invigorating. If possible, aid by giving manual labor, but let it be such as shall be educating. When we talk of manual labor for girls, we seem always to mean household duties. A college student can often make herself useful by copying for professors, or by tutoring slow pupils, as well as by less pleasing domestic work. I think young girls at colleges where land is allotted to them for cultivation might raise and sell flowers and seeds. Form, for any young girl, a habit of earning money, and you give her a lifelong advantage. I consider it one of my duties to the young women who come into my department to encourage a respect for remunerative occupation. Why should girls be brought up with an idea that paid labor is ignoble?
If you cannot give to a good girl a chance to work her way through college, give money into her hands. Do not help her by buying her books, by paying her bills, or by bestowing unsuitable costume. Let her learn the value of money. Most girls would prefer a loan, and the very carefulness to repay a loan would be a check to unnecessary expense. But as some very sensible girls are timid about a loan, I should say, "Give," but give just the amount sufficient to bridge over the difficult place; do not make the journey ruinously easy. Our Vassar girls receive aid from a fund left by the founder of the college. Many of them return it as soon as they are able, for the use of the coming classes. It is small, and but few can receive it in one year. I would increase the number who can receive, rather than the amount to each student.

This direct aid given to certain students by individuals is good, but it is limited to exceptional cases. We reverse the order of nature. We are careful of the single life, we are careless of the type.

**HOW SHALL WE MAKE THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN STILL HIGHER?**

I never look at a group of teachers such as are employed in the colleges for girls but I am reminded of the expression of St. Ambrose, "the noble army of martyrs." The work of a teacher should be such as does not kill, for the value of human life is quite as great in the case of the teacher as in that of the student.

The pleasant smile with which a young teacher greets her class as she enters upon her duties should become more serene, more inspiring at middle life. But how can it be? I find that the number of students to one teacher is usually fifty! The amount of work that teachers do is enormous. There seems to be no "getting through." They work five or six hours a day and then take to their rooms the written examinations and problems for their evening recreation. Besides, a good teacher does infinitely higher work outside of tutorial hours. I have sometimes looked at the variety of work done for some young girl,—the careful watching over her health, the good counsel given in morals, the patient endurance with loose mental habits,—and I have said to myself, "How little that parent knows the enormous return which he gets for his moneyed investment!"

We are constantly told that too many women become teachers. Yes; but the number would not be too great if fewer students were put into the hands of one teacher. A teacher should not cease to be a student; she cannot, with safety; she should have time for new acquisitions. I would not say, give time by lengthening vacations,
but I would say, give time by lessening the number of students. A young girl needs the companionship in her classes of a few, but the teacher should know each pupil individually. According to my own idea, the proper number for good class work is ten; but when I asked a professor of Cornell how many he thought best for class and professor, he said, "Four." Given a small class and a teacher of any magnetism, and there need be no required attendance.

A large class requires much routine work to enable it to move without friction, and to some persons the precision of military drill is the poetry of motion. I mourn over any loss of individuality.

We should increase the number of teachers by lessening the number of students to each, and diminish the number by retiring the old and worn-out. In New York State a judge is retired at seventy, but a professor in a college may have a life tenure. The retired teacher should be pensioned. It is a great wrong to students to retain the incompetent teacher who would gladly rest; it is base and cruel to turn off the old teacher penniless. I have known a woman whom every one respected and whose pupils loved her, to retire, after forty years of labor in one school, without even the small purse and small speech usually proffered to the cast-off clergyman. And this in Massachusetts.

Our colleges are too expensive for the class which most needs them. We ought to reach the large middle class. We do not. From the great city of New York there are usually ten students in Vassar College; and as many from New York are at Vassar as at any other college. If we take out of New York life those for whom Europe is the college, those for whom the workshop is the university, those for whom society is the universe, we still have an enormous residuum of young women who should be studying. For these our colleges are too expensive. The cost of a girl's education is much greater than that of a boy. Why should it be so? Why should not girls club together, board themselves in a wholesome and inexpensive way, obtain some light employment which will add to their means, and dress for almost nothing? I touch the subject of expense in dress with a sinking heart, for I know that no party is with me; I stand almost alone. We need organized missionary work on the subject. Young women say, "It is our duty to look pretty"; and one would suppose, from the attention paid to it, that it was the highest duty. In the very homes whose walls are unadorned with pictures and whose book-shelves contain no standard works, the wardrobe is defended on aesthetic grounds. I have visited in the houses of English noblemen whose daughters would be shocked at the expensiveness of the college and
school costumes of the daughters of our ordinary mechanics. This is a question of *taste* only. But what shall we say of that family in which the personal decoration continues to be costly after financial reverse has come to its head?

I hope the time will come when colleges will be able to give up the pomps and parades of public days. Why should the conferring of degrees at commencement be heralded by noisy music? Is the college commencement a *necessary* evil? Girls need no stimulus to work. The commencement ceremonies are in the thoughts of an ambitious girl from the time she enters college until she graduates. The “part” at commencement haunts her; the college degree, she feels, is sure, but for the sake of the loved ones at home, she hopes and works and prays for what she considers the “honor.” Is it a healthy influence?

There can be no other motive for great gatherings at colleges than that of indirect advertising. The guests who come to the college see nothing of its methods of working; they see the college building and its inmates in full dress; they know nothing of the unremitting, hard, conscientious study which is done behind the scenes.

When we have done all that we can to lessen the expense inside the walls of the college,—when those of us who have longed for college education, and to whom it has been denied for want of means, contribute our small aids,—but little has been done toward bringing the colleges within the reach of the large middle class which needs them.

What our colleges need is *endowment*. But I would not have it take the shape of buildings. Buildings should come as they are called for, and be adapted to the call. Our colleges should not be monuments to the dead, but workshops for the living. There is no beauty in unfitness. There stands on Carlton Hill, in Edinburgh, a temple which would delight the heart of an old Greek by its architectural beauty. It is the astronomical observatory, and every classic ornament hides the height of the stars from the observer.

Thirty years ago I heard Professor Henry say that what he had needed was a simple office, and the government had put him into the Smithsonian Institution. There is a story of a distinguished chemist, who, when a visitor asked to be shown his laboratory, turned to the servant and said, “John, bring in the laboratory,” and it was brought in on a waiter. I know two buildings for educational purposes, which are exactly adapted to the demand of the hour. Both were built by women. The first is the woman's laboratory in Boston, where every cent has been spent for science and the investigations of science.
The second is the building of the School of Philosophy at Concord. It is a plain one-story building; its outward decoration the vine which creeps up its unpainted sides; its only music the song of birds. It shelters the summer philosophers; its lookout from the numerous windows is inspiring, its ventilation is excellent.

What our colleges need is such endowment as shall bring them within the reach of the large middle class. The amount of money given to girls' colleges is pitifully small. The endowment of all the girls' colleges put together does not come up to that of Harvard alone. Why are not our colleges endowed? Because our people do not quite believe in that kind of education for boys: in the case of girls there is positive disbelief; the tone of the press is against it.

A New York editor once said to me, "The highest duty of a woman is to be ornamental in the parlor." He forgot that the majority of women have no parlors. I take up at random newspaper scraps, and I read:—

"Last year twelve persons in the United States gave an aggregate of $3,000,000 to foreign missions."

"Mr. S—gives $25,000 for charitable, benevolent, and educational purposes in this country."

These scraps do not unfairly represent the ratio of interest felt for foreign missions and home schools; very rarely is anything given directly for the education of girls. It would be well if something of the missionary's spirit and the revivalist's zeal came into our staid and decorous methods of dealing with educational subjects. To my view, the admission of women to school suffrage in Massachusetts is a very great gain to the cause of education. Perhaps it is larger to me because I am far off, thus inverting the law of optics; for I hear it spoken of as small gain in Massachusetts. But it is eventually the gain of all that we ask for women; it is the beginning, and the best beginning. All that women ask for is the enlightenment of our present rulers; the foreign-born boy takes a lesson indirectly from the women who as school committee visit the school. Massachusetts was better prepared for school suffrage than New York can be for a long time. The women's clubs had led the way. The community had become accustomed to hearing from women, had learned to value the opinions of women; the suffrage movement had reached the ears of women; the temperance movement had gone to their hearts; women had already become the leading orators: it was comparatively a little thing to drop a ballot into a box. When all the women of the land are roused to an interest in the public schools, the "hundreds of millions" for women's colleges, or for men's colleges, or for both together, will not be wanting.