# HARRIET MARTINEAU ON WOMEN

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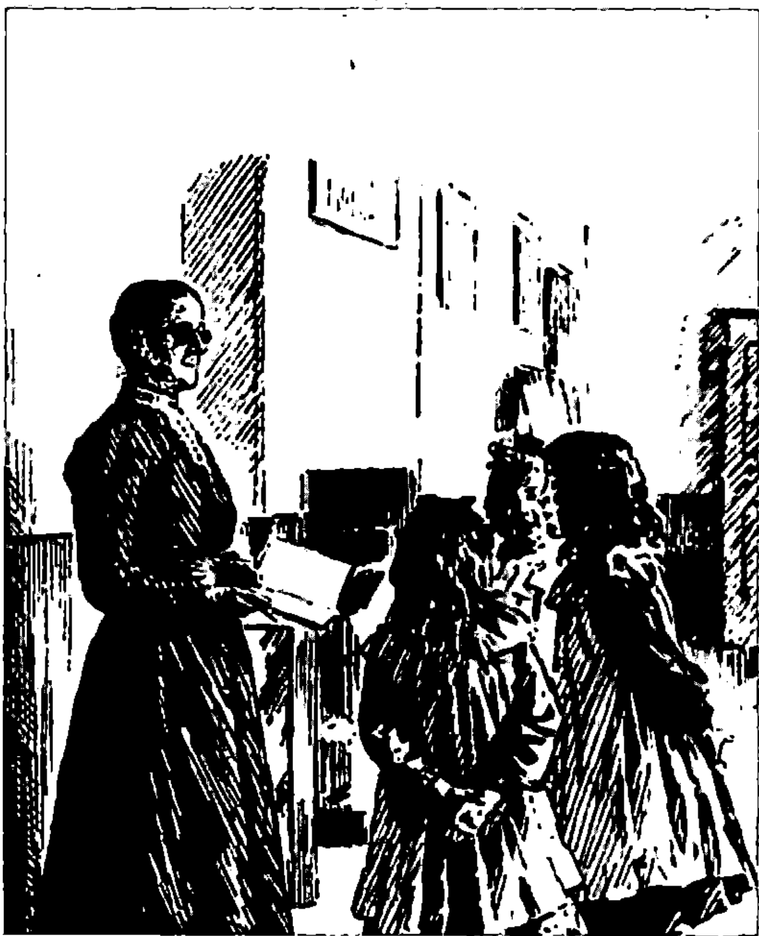
# III

# ON WOMEN'S EDUCATION

*When I was young, it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously; and especially with pen in hand. Young ladies (at least in provincial towns) were expected to sit down in the parlour to sew,—during which reading aloud was permitted,—or to practice their music; but so as to be fit to receive callers, without any signs of bluestockingism which could be reported abroad. Jane Austen herself, the Queen of novelists, the immortal creator of Anne Elliott, Mr. Knightley, and a score or two more of unrivalled intimate friends of the whole public, was compelled by the feelings of her family to cover up her manuscripts with a large piece of muslin work, kept on the table for the purpose, whenever any genteel people came in. So it was with other young ladies, for some time after Jane Austen was in her grave; and thus my first studies in philosophy were carried on with great care and reserve.*

—*Harriet Martineau*
**AUTOBIOGRAPHY**



Teacher and Pupils

*Teacher*. "I wonder what your mother would say if she knew how backward you are in geography?"

*Girl*. "Oh, my mother says she never learnt jogfry and she's married, and Aunt Sally says *she* never learnt jogfry and *she's* married; and you did and you ain't."

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A central doctrine of Martineau's feminist thought from the very start of her writing career was the importance of education for women. Excerpts from her second *Monthly Repository* article, "On Female Education," written in 1822, open this section. In that piece, written when she was barely twenty years old, Martineau made the claim, amazing for her youth and period, that women's intellectual inferiority to men is based on women's lack of mental training, others' expectations of women, and women's circumstances rather than women's ability. She cleverly sidestepped the issue of whether women *can* be men's equals, saying instead she was looking "to show the expediency of giving proper scope and employment to the powers which they [women] do possess."

Similarly, she avoided the nature versus nurture argument of whether educational potential is dependent on "the structure of the body" or "bodily frame." Although in this youthful argument, published in the organ of Unitarian Christianity to which she was then faithful, she allowed that women should be educated to enhance their relationships to men and make them better mothers and held that the greatest value of education is to give women a better understanding of Christianity, she nevertheless had a very clear-sighted perception of the dreariness and degradation, the retrogression that lack of education means in women's lives.

In later life, Martineau was to abandon and even to repudiate the religion that this early essay relied upon, but she was always to believe in the great importance of education for women.

Forty years later she was of a different mind on the *purpose* but not on the benefit of women's education. Writing in *Once a Week* in 1861, she deplored the justification of "good intellectual training as fitting women to be 'mothers of heroes,' 'companions to men,' and so on. . . . Till it is proposed, in educating girls, to make them, in themselves and for their own sakes, as good specimens of the human being as the conditions of the case allow, very little will be effected by any expenditure of pains, time, and money."

Included here are pieces on basic education for women, including a section from her 1848 book, *Household Education*, which was a kind of popular manual for the moral and practical instruction of a household, and a long article from *Cornhill*

*Magazine* (1864) entitled "Middle-Class Education in England: Girls." In both of these she held that education should be for the sake of improving the person. She insisted that girls should study the same subjects as boys, that both should have time in school for both study and play, mental exercise and physical exercise, but that girls should study the domestic arts as well.

Never did she question that women should become skillful at housekeeping; rather she claimed that education would make them better at it. This is drawn from her own life, for she prided herself on her needlework, her household management, and the sensible way in which she entertained. She argues in several contexts that not all Englishwomen are cared for by a man and that women need to be educated for an occupation so that they can earn their own way. These ideas came out of Martineau's own middle-class experience of having been left with a small legacy poorly invested. It did not occur to her to argue for universal education. She did, however, favor higher education for qualified women early on and enthusiastically supported the establishment in London of Queen's College in Hartley Street and the Ladies' College in Bedford Square (now Bedford College). An article on higher education, "What Women are Educated For," forms the third selection in this section.

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# ON FEMALE EDUCATION

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*Norwich, November, 1822*

In discussing the subject of Female Education, it is not so much my object to inquire whether the natural powers of women be equal to those of men, as to shew the expediency of giving proper scope and employment to the powers which they do possess. It may be as well, notwithstanding, to in-

*Monthly Repository* 17 (October 1822): 77–81.

quire whether the difference be as great as is generally supposed between the mental structure of men and of women.

Doubtless the formation of the mind must depend in a great degree on the structure of the body. From this cause the strength of mind observable in men is supposed to arise; and the delicacy of the female mind is thought to be in agreement with the bodily frame. But it is impossible to ascertain how much may depend on early education; nor can we solve our doubts on this head by turning our view to savage countries, where, if the bodily strength be nearly equal in the two sexes, their minds are alike sunk in ignorance and darkness. In our own country, we find that as long as the studies of children of both sexes continue the same, the progress they make is equal. After the rudiments of knowledge have been obtained, in the cultivated ranks of society, (of which alone I mean to speak,) the boy goes on continually increasing his stock of information, it being his only employment to store and exercise his mind for future years; while the girl is probably confined to low pursuits, her aspirings after knowledge are subdued, she is taught to believe that solid information is unbecoming her sex, almost her whole time is expended on light accomplishments, and thus before she is sensible of her powers, they are checked in their growth; chained down to mean objects, to rise no more; and when the natural consequences of this mode of treatment arise, all mankind agree that the abilities of women are far inferior to those of men. But in the few instances where a contrary mode of treatment has been pursued, where fair play has been given to the faculties, even without much assistance, what has almost invariably been the result? Has it not been evident that the female mind, though in many respects differently constituted from that of man, may be well brought into comparison with his? If she wants his enterprising spirit, the deficiency is made up by perseverance in what she does undertake; for his ambition, she has a thirst for knowledge; and for his ready perception, she has unwearied application.

It is proof sufficient to my mind, that there is no natural deficiency of power, that, unless proper objects are supplied to women to employ their faculties, their energies are exerted improperly. Some aim they must have, and if no good one is presented to them, they must seek for a bad one.

We may find evidence in abundance of this truth in the condition of women before the introduction of Christianity.

Before the revelation of this blessed religion, (doubly blessed to the female sex,) what was their situation? They were either sunk almost to the level of the brutes in mental darkness, buried in their own homes, the slaves instead of the companions of their husbands, only to be preserved from vice by being excluded from the world, or, not being able to endure these restraints, employing their restless powers and turbulent passions in the pursuit of vicious pleasures and sensual gratifications. And we cannot wonder that this was the case, when they were gifted with faculties which they were not permitted to exercise, and were compelled to vegetate from year to year, with no object in life and no hope in death. Observe what an immediate change was wrought by the introduction of Christianity. Mark the zeal, directed by knowledge, of the female converts, of so many of whom St. Paul makes honourable mention as his friends, on account of their exertions in the great cause. An object was held out for them to obtain, and their powers were bent to the attainment of it, instead of being engaged in vice and folly. The female character has been observed to improve since that time, in proportion as the treasures of useful knowledge have been placed within the reach of the sex.

I wish to imply by what I have said, not that great stores of information are as necessary to women as to men, but that as much care should be taken of the formation of their minds. Their attainments cannot in general be so great, because they have their own appropriate duties and peculiar employments, the neglect of which nothing can excuse; but I contend that these duties will be better performed if the powers be rationally employed. If the whole mind be exercised and strengthened, it will bring more vigour to the performance of its duties in any particular province.

The first great objection which is made to enlightening the female mind is, that if engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, women neglect their appropriate duties and peculiar employments.

2nd. That the greatest advances that the female mind can make in knowledge, must still fall far short of the attainments of the other sex.

3rd. That the vanity so universally ascribed to the sex is apt to be inflated by any degree of proficiency in knowledge, and that women therefore become forgetful of the subordinate station assigned them by law, natural and divine.

To the first objection I answer, that such a pursuit of knowledge as shall lead women to neglect their peculiar duties, is not that cultivation of mind for the utility of which I am contending. But these duties may be well performed without engaging the whole time and *attention*. If "great thoughts constitute great minds," what can be expected from a woman whose whole intellect is employed on the trifling cares and comparatively mean occupations, to which the advocates for female ignorance would condemn her? These cares and these occupations were allotted to women to enable them to smooth our way through life; they were designed as a means to this end, and should never be pursued as the end itself. The knowledge of these necessary acts is so easily acquired, and they are so easily performed, that an active mind will feel a dismal vacuity, a craving after something nobler and better to employ the thoughts in the intervals of idleness which must occur when these calls of duty are answered, and if nothing nobler and better is presented to it, it will waste its energies in the pursuit of folly, if not of vice, and thus continually perpetuate the faults of the sex. . . .

It must be allowed by all, that one of woman's first duties is to qualify herself for being a companion to her husband, or to those with whom her lot in life is cast. She was formed to be a domestic companion, and such an one as shall give to home its charms, as shall furnish such entertainment that her husband need not be driven abroad for amusement. This is one of the first duties required from a woman, and no time can be misemployed which is applied to the purpose of making her *such a* companion, and I contend that a friend like this cannot be found among women of uncultivated minds. If their thoughts are continually occupied by the vanities of the world, if that time which is not required for the fulfilment of household duties, is spent in folly, or even in harmless trifles in which the husband has no interest, how are the powers of pleasing to be perpetuated, how is she to find interesting subjects for social converse? . . .

If we consider woman as the guardian and instructress of

infancy, her claims to cultivation of mind become doubly urgent. It is evident that if the soul of the teacher is narrow and contracted, that of the pupil cannot be enlarged. . . .

With respect to the second objection, viz., That the greatest advances which the female mind can make in knowledge must fall far short of the attainments of the other sex,—I allow that the acquirements of women can seldom equal those of men, and it is not desirable that they should. I do not wish to excite a spirit of rivalry between the sexes; I do not desire that many females should seek for fame as authors. I only wish that their powers should be so employed that they should not be obliged to seek amusements beneath them, and injurious to them. I wish them to be companions to men, instead of playthings or servants, one of which an ignorant woman must commonly be. If they are called to be wives, a sensible mind is an essential qualification for the domestic character; if they remain single, liberal pursuits are absolutely necessary to preserve them from the faults so generally attributed to that state, and so justly and inevitably, while the mind is buried in darkness.

If it be asked what kind and degree of knowledge is necessary to preserve women from the evils mentioned as following in the train of ignorance, I answer that much must depend on natural talent, fortune and station; but no Englishwoman, above the lower ranks of life, ought to be ignorant of the Evidences and Principles of her religious belief, of Sacred History, of the outline at least of General History, of the Elements of the Philosophy of Nature, and of the Human Mind; and to these should be added the knowledge of such living languages, and the acquirement of such accomplishments, as situation and circumstances may direct.

With respect to the third objection, viz., that the vanity so universally ascribed to the sex is apt to be inflated by any degree of proficiency in knowledge, and that women, therefore, become forgetful of the subordinate station assigned them by law, natural and divine: the most important part of education, the implanting of religious principles must be in part neglected, if the share of knowledge which women may appropriate, should be suffered to inflate their vanity, or excite feelings of pride. Christian humility should be one of the first requisites in female education, and till it is attained every ac-

quirement of every kind will become a cause of self-exaltation, and those accomplishments which are the most rare, will of course be looked upon with the most self-complacency. But if the taste for knowledge were more generally infused, and if proficiency in the attainments I have mentioned were more common, there would be much less pedantry than there is at present; for when acquirements of this kind are no longer remarkable, they cease to afford a subject for pride. . . .

Let woman then be taught that her powers of mind were given her to be improved. Let her be taught that she is to be a rational companion to those of the other sex among whom her lot in life is cast, that her proper sphere is *home*—that there she is to provide, not only for the bodily comfort of the man, but that she is to enter also into community of mind with him; . . . As she finds nobler objects presented to her grasp, and that her rank in the scale of being is elevated, she will engraft the vigorous qualities of the mind of man on her own blooming virtues, and insinuate into his mind those softer graces and milder beauties, which will smooth the ruggedness of his character. . . .

DISCIPULUS

# HOUSEHOLD EDUCATION

I mention girls, as well as boys, confident that every person able to see the right, and courageous enough to utter it, will sanction what I say. I must declare that on no subject is more nonsense talked, (as it seems to me) than on that of female education, when restriction is advocated. In works otherwise really good, we find it taken for granted that girls are not to learn the dead languages and mathematics, because they are not to exer-

Harriet Martineau, *Household Education* (London: E. Moxon, 1848), pp. 240–245.

cise professions where these attainments are wanted; and a little further on we find it said that the chief reason for boys and young men studying these things is to improve the quality of their minds. I suppose none of us will doubt that everything possible should be done to improve the quality of the mind of every human being.—If it is said that the female brain is incapable of studies of an abstract nature,—that is not true: for there are many instances of women who have been good mathematicians, and good classical scholars. The plea is indeed nonsense on the face of it; for the brain which will learn French will learn Greek; the brain which enjoys arithmetic is capable of mathematics.—If it is said that women are light-minded and superficial, the obvious answer is that their minds should be the more carefully sobered by grave studies, and the acquisition of exact knowledge.—If it is said that their vocation in life does not require these kinds of knowledge,—that is giving up the main plea for the pursuit of them by boys;—that it improves the quality of their minds.—If it is said that such studies unfit women for their proper occupations,—that again is untrue. Men do not attend the less to their professional business, their counting-house or their shop, for having their minds enlarged and enriched, and their faculties strengthened by sound and various knowledge; nor do women on that account neglect the work-basket, the market, the dairy and the kitchen. If it be true that women are made for these domestic occupations, then of course they will be fond of them. They will be so fond of what comes most naturally to them that no book-study (if really not congenial to their minds) will draw them off from their homely duties. For my part, I have no hesitation whatever in saying that the most ignorant women I have known have been the worst housekeepers; and that the most learned women I have known have been among the best,—wherever they have been early taught and trained to household business, as every woman ought to be. A woman of superior mind knows better than an ignorant one what to require of her servants, how to deal with tradespeople, and how to economise time: she is more clear-sighted about the best ways of doing things; has a richer mind with which to animate all about her, and to solace her own spirit in the midst of her labours. If nobody doubts the difference in pleasantness of having to do with a silly and narrow-minded woman and with

one who is intelligent and enlightened, it must be clear that the more intelligence and enlightenment there is, the better. One of the best housekeepers I know,—a simple-minded, affectionate-hearted woman, whose table is always fit for a prince to sit down to, whose house is always neat and elegant, and whose small income yields the greatest amount of comfort, is one of the most learned women ever heard of. When she was a little girl, she was sitting sewing in the window-seat while her brother was receiving his first lesson in mathematics from his tutor. She listened, and was delighted with what she heard; and when both left the room, she seized upon the Euclid that lay on the table, ran up to her room, went over the lesson, and laid the volume where it was before. Every day after this, she sat stitching away and listening, in like manner, and going over the lesson afterwards, till one day she let out the secret. Her brother could not answer a question which was put to him two or three times; and, without thinking of anything else, she popped out the answer. The tutor was surprised, and after she had told the simple truth, she was permitted to make what she could of Euclid. Some time after, she spoke confidentially to a friend of the family,—a scientific professor,—asking him, with much hesitation and many blushes, whether he thought it was wrong for a woman to learn Latin. "Certainly not," he said; "provided she does not neglect any duty for it.—But why do you want to learn Latin?" She wanted to study Newton's Principia: and the professor thought this a very good reason. Before she was grown into a woman, she had mastered the Principia of Newton. And now, the great globe on which we live is to her a book in which she reads the choice secrets of nature; and to her the last known wonders of the sky are disclosed: and if there is a home more graced with accomplishments, and more filled with comforts, I do not know such an one. Will anybody say that this woman would have been in any way better without her learning?—while we may confidently say that she would have been much less happy.

As for women not wanting learning, or superior intellectual training, that is more than any one should undertake to say in our day. In former times, it was understood that every woman, (except domestic servants) was maintained by her father, brother or husband; but it is not so now. The footing of women is changed, and it will change more. Formerly,

every woman was destined to be married; and it was almost a matter of course that she would be: so that the only occupation thought of for a woman was keeping her husband's house, and being a wife and mother. It is not so now. From a variety of causes, there is less and less marriage among the middle classes of our country; and much of the marriage that there is does not take place till middle life. A multitude of women have to maintain themselves who would never have dreamed of such a thing a hundred years ago. This is not the place for a discussion whether this is a good thing for women or a bad one; or for a lamentation that the occupations by which women might maintain themselves are so few; and of those few, so many engrossed by men. This is not the place for a speculation as to whether women are to grow into a condition of self-maintenance, and their dependence for support upon father, brother and husband to become only occasional. With these considerations, interesting as they are, we have no business at this moment. What we have to think of is the necessity,—in all justice, in all honour, in all humanity, in all prudence,—that every girl's faculties should be made the most of, as carefully as boys'. While so many women are no longer sheltered, and protected, and supported, in safety from the world (as people used to say) every woman ought to be fitted to take care of herself. Every woman ought to have that justice done to her faculties that she may possess herself in all the strength and clearness of an exercised and enlightened mind, and may have at command, for her subsistence, as much intellectual power and as many resources as education can furnish her with. Let us hear nothing of her being shut out, because she is a woman, from any study that she is capable of pursuing: and if one kind of cultivation is more carefully attended to than another, let it be the discipline and exercise of the reasoning faculties. From the simplest rules of arithmetic let her go on, as her brother does, as far into the depths of science, and up to the heights of philosophy as her powers and opportunities permit; and it will certainly be found that the more she becomes a reasoning creature, the more reasonable, disciplined and docile she will be: the more she knows of the value of knowledge and of all other things, the more diligent she will be;—the more sensible of duty,—the more interested in

occupations,—the more womanly. This is only coming round to the points we started from; that every human being is to be made as perfect as possible: and that this must be done through the most complete development of all the faculties.

# WHAT WOMEN ARE EDUCATED FOR

Among the observances of the London summer are now the annual meetings of the authorities of the Ladies' Colleges, which are a new feature in English society. The kinds of attention paid to these meetings, and of comment made upon them are very various. I am at present concerned with only one of the many points of view from which these institutions are regarded.

At the recent annual meeting of Queen's College (for Ladies), Harley Street, the chair was filled by the Right Honourable W. Cowper. The Dean of the College, and some of the Professors, several clergymen, and many friends of the pupils were present, as well as the main body of the pupils. Having had opportunity to see, through a long life, what men have, at this age of the world, been thinking for two generations about the education of women, I always read with interest the reports of such annual meetings as that at the Harley Street College, and amuse myself with marking the progress of opinion disclosed by the speakers. On the late occasion (July 4th), the chairman's speech was perhaps better understood in its bearings by some hearers and readers than by himself. My experience of men's minds on this particular subject satisfies me that Mr. Cowper believed himself to be exceedingly liberal in his views, so that he was doing something virtuous,—something that would win gratitude from one sex, if it did not inspire re-

*Once a Week*, August 10, 1861, pp. 175–179.

spect for his courage in the other, in asserting the claims of women to a good education. I have usually traced in the gentlemen present at such meetings a happy complacency, an air of amiable magnanimity, which it was unnecessary to find fault with,—it was so natural and so harmless;—a keen sense of the pleasures of generous patronage, in seeing that women have a fair opportunity of a better cultivation than had been given before; but it is not often that the complacency is so evident, and so self-confident, as in Mr. Cowper's speech of the 4th instant. He has evidently no misgiving about the height of his own liberality when he assumes that the grand use of a good education to a woman is that it improves her usefulness to somebody else. This is the turn that praise of female enlightenment has always taken among men till very lately, when one here and there ventures to assume that the first object of a good education is to improve the individual as an individual. Mr. Cowper has not got beyond the notion of the majority of the friends of female education, who think they have said everything when they have recommended good intellectual training as fitting women to be "mothers of heroes," "companions to men," and so on. No great deal will be done for female improvement while this sort of sentiment is supposed to be the loftiest and most liberal.

Girls will never make a single effort, in any length of school years, for such an object as being companions to men, and mothers of heroes. If they work, and finally justify the pains taken for them in establishing such colleges as these, it will be for the same reasons that boys work well, and come out worthy of their schooling;—because they like their studies, and enjoy the sense of mental and moral development which is so strong in school and college years; and because their training is well adapted to educe, develop, and strengthen their powers, and render them as wise and good as their natures, years, and circumstances permit.

Till it is proposed, in educating girls, to make them, in themselves and for their own sakes, as good specimens of the human being as the conditions of the case allow, very little will be effected by any expenditure of pains, time, and money. . . .

The common plea is that the boys are so expensive that there is not much to spare for the girls' education. This is no particular concern of the college managers; but there are par-

ents who seem to think that they are doing something virtuous in coming to bargain and haggle for the greatest amount of instruction for the smallest possible sum. They would not think of haggling with the master of the public school their boys go to. They pay down their hundred or two a-year for each boy; but, when it comes to the girls, they contrive, and assume, and beg, till they get in one or two younger girls on cheap terms, or send the governess to sit by as guardian, and pick up a lesson without pay. The mothers are apt to take credit for such management, on the ground of the trouble they have with the fathers to get any money out of them for college-lessons, when a governess (if they could find a paragon of one for a reasonable salary) might "educate" any number of girls for the same terms as one. It does not particularly concern the college managers what the fathers say at home about family plans: but they hear a good deal about it, through the expositions the mothers think fit to make of their own virtue and ability in contriving to get their daughters' education done as cheaply as possible.

But this may not be a true account of the fathers' notions, I may be reminded. I rather think it is, in the majority of cases. It is not only in newspapers, in angry letters called forth by some new phase of female education or employment, that fathers inquire what possible use there can be in learning this or that. While a narrow-minded commercial man says, in a newspaper effusion, that girls should be fitted for managing the house and doing the needlework, and that all study beyond this is mischievous; a common-place professional man says, at his own table or his club, that it ought not to cost much to teach his girls as much as it is good for them to know: that the whole college course at Harley Street or Bedford Square is more than he thinks it right to afford while his boys are at school. Not that it is a costly education: it is very much otherwise, considering its quality: but he cannot see the use of making the girls so learned. In fact, he has told his wife how much he will spend on the girls, and she may get for them as much as she can for the money.

And what are the girls thinking meantime? An old hermit cannot undertake to report their views, which are probably very seldom uttered. But it is clear, from the college reports, and by what is known in the world of the results thus far, that

the young ladies are disposed to be industrious, are highly intelligent, and cheerful and happy amidst their intellectual pursuits. We may fairly suppose therefore that they either see a use in what they learn, or learn for other reasons than the thought of utility: that in school and classrooms they are, in short, like their brothers. The boys are not encouraged to study for such a reason as becoming intelligent companions to somebody hereafter, or being the fathers of great men. The boys know that they are to be made as wise as they can be made under their conditions; that the knowledge they gain is a good in itself; and that their fathers do not, in paying their bills, pause in doubt whether they are justified in spending so much money for such an object as the enlightenment of their children. If at their desks, I should say that they have higher and truer notions of the operation, value, and fitness of knowledge in their own case than many of their parents. Possibly some of them could teach the chairman of their annual meeting that there are better reasons for their being well educated than the prospect he holds out of their "influence" hereafter—the use they are to be of furthering the objects of men.

I am not unmindful, however, of the great advance made—the remarkable conquest of prejudice—within a few years. It required some courage, till within a few years, to speak of any sort of college in connection with female studies: and nothing short of heroism and every kind of magnanimity was requisite to make any man offer himself for a professorship in such colleges. It is very different now, though too many of my acquaintances still perpetually fall into the old notion that women have no occasion for intellectual cultivation. I have never wondered at, nor much regretted, the dislike to the very name of "college," considering what we have seen done, and heard said, in foreign institutions bearing that title. There are great joint-stock company's schools in America, advertised and glorified under the name of colleges, from which English parents and brothers would flee away, and take refuge in the wild woods, rather than "assist" at an annual meeting. The public exhibition of intellect and sensibility, the recitations, the compositions, the essays on metaphysical or moral subjects, the prize-giving, the newspaper reports of the pupils,—all this, and the dreadful hollowness and abominable taste of the whole display, might well cause English fathers to start back

from the first mention of female colleges at home. So might the continental celebrations which we still witness occasionally, where the most virtuous school girl is crowned in the presence of a throng of visitors; and where virtue in detail—honour, sensibility, fidelity, &c., &c.—is rewarded by prizes and praises. But it is now understood that our colleges for ladies have nothing in common with institutions in which these terrible exhibitions can take place. Our young maidens altogether decline publicity, and could not condescend to try for prizes or accept praises. They are plainly zealous for the honour of their college; but no one of them has anything to gain for herself beyond the privileges of learning and art. There is a wider difference between such colleges as we see annually glorified in American journals and those of Bedford Square and Harley Street than between these last and the closest and narrowest education given in an aristocratic schoolroom, by an unrelieved governess, to two or three secluded and spiritless girls who never heard a masterly exposition of anything in their lives. But due credit should be given to such fathers of the present generation as have surmounted their horror at the name of colleges for young ladies.

The whole significance of the matter—the whole importance of the assumption involved in Mr. Cowper's speech about qualifying women by education to "stir up man" and improve the nation—can hardly be seen without reverting to some of the stages that women have passed through within two or three generations, and then turning to some recent discussions which have caused a strong sensation in London society, and a good deal beyond it.

There was a great notion of making women learned several times during the last century. We know almost as much of the reign of the female pedants as of the history of any political party in the time of George III. I do not wish to dwell on the subject, for there was nothing in the writings of the Blues[1] of the last century which need detain us now, or which would

[1] Refers to bluestockings, British society women of the eighteenth century who attempted to arrange intellectual "conversations" with literary figures as social events. A term commonly used derisively for intellectual women with affectations, although some of the original bluestockings were quite capable.

have obtained praise in any society where women were duly respected,—which is the same thing as being truly appreciated. We need not trouble ourselves now with the Sewards, the Carters, the Veseys, Hamiltons, Mores, Montagues, and others who, without anything like the genuine knowledge now attainable by women, poured out sentiment and fancies which they mistook for intellectual products. We need not pause on these, nor criticise their works; but I must mention them, in order to recall the Blue-stocking stage of female education, and also because they are a foil to the really well-educated women of the period. I knew the Miss Berrys, and the Miss Baillies, and the empress of her sex in her own time and after,—Mrs. Barbauld.[2] The Miss Berrys were a favourable specimen of the Blue order: not only clever and well-read, but enlightened;—rather blue, certainly, but sensible, kindly, sufficiently practical for their position—in short, certainly the better for their intellectual cultivation, and in no way the worse for it. The Baillies were not Blue. Joanna's genius was too strong and natural to be overlaid by any amount of reading she was disposed to undertake. All the sources of wisdom were open to her;—Nature, books, and life: and she drew from them all in happy proportion; so that she became the wise and happy woman that every wise father would desire his daughter to be in herself, whatever she might also do for, and be to other people. If Joanna Baillie had written nothing, she would have been the beloved and revered being that she is in all memories. The only difference is that her lot as an author affords further evidence of the robust character of her mind, in the equal serenity with which she regarded the rise, and culmination, and decline of her own fame. No seat of irritability seems to have been ever touched, more or less, by such a celebrity as very few women have ever attained, or by that extinction of her fame, which must have appeared to her unjust, if the fame had not been itself a delusion. Less celebrated, but

[2]Mary (1763–1852) and Agnes (1764–1852) Berry. Mary edited a posthumous edition of Horace Walpole's collected works and wrote plays, memoirs, and social history. The two were close friends of Walpole. Joanna Baillie (1762–1851), Scottish poet and dramatist. She and her sister lived on Hampstead Heath many years and received such visitors as Sir Walter Scott. Mrs. Letitia Aikin Barbauld (1743–1825), a neighbor and friend of the Misses Baillie, was a poet and essayist.

hardly less highly endowed, and more thoroughly educated than Joanna Baillie, or perhaps any other woman of her time, was Mrs. Barbauld, whose few but exquisite writings still kindle enthusiasm in duly qualified readers who happen to pick up anything of hers in their path of study.

Her father educated her with her brother; and we see in her noble style, full of power, clearness, and grace, one of the results of her sound classical training. We see others in her compactness of thought, and closeness of expression; while the warm glow of sentiment, pure as the sunlight, excludes all appearance of pedantry, or unsuitableness to the hour in which she wrote. Fox pronounced her "Essay on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations," "the finest essay in the English language,"—no one being more aware than he must have been of the classical origin of the train of thought, so admirably conveyed in vivid English. The strength and discipline of her moral nature were only too well proved by the experience of her married life. She underwent, with noble outward serenity, a long and excruciating trial from her husband's insanity, which ended in suicide. The "Dirge," which remains among her poems, discloses to those who knew her something of what lay under the dignity and calm which she preserved for his sake. The strain and shock induced an indolence, or reluctance to act, and make any appearance, which has deprived us of much which she would no doubt have written, if she had not lost the spirit and gaiety of her early life; but we have enough to understand how it was that her reason and fancy swayed all minds that approached her own, and her words burned themselves in on the memories of all who fell in with them. . . .

Her father certainly did not train her to be somebody's companion, or somebody's mother. He treated her and her brother alike, with the view of freely opening to both the way to wisdom. Her education was a pure blessing to her. It was to her what she briefly and brilliantly describes intellectual pursuits to be in her celebrated essay. Her firm grasp of philosophy, her student-like habit of mind, and the scholarly discipline she underwent did not impair, in the slightest degree, her womanly grace, her delicate reserve, or the glow of her friendships. It is true, she was not much of a needlewoman. There is a tradition that the skeleton of a mouse was found in

her workbag; but this kind of disinclination is seen in women who know no language but their own, and whose ideas do not range beyond their own street. As her husband's aider in the work of his great school at Palgrave, and as a motherly hostess to the little boys, she was tenderly remembered by some men of distinction who had stood at her knee. A nobler and sweeter presence than Mrs. Barbauld's I have never witnessed; and I have heard from some of her own generation that her sprightliness was once as bewitching as her composure was afterwards pathetic.

In the next generation after the Blues of the last century, there seems to have been a sort of reaction in regard to the education of at least the middle-class girls. As far as I have heard from many quarters, the mothers of the early part of this century were less informed, less able in even the common affairs of life, than those who immediately preceded and followed them. There were, of course, reasons for this: but I cannot go into them now. It is enough to recall to the memory of old people what they heard in their childhood of the boarding-schools, sewing-schools, and day-schools in which their mothers had received their education, as it was called. . . . There was, however, a marked improvement: and the hardness of the times, introducing competition into the governess department, directed more attention upon education. From that day to this the whole conception of the objects and methods of education has been expanding and improving; and perhaps not even the city Arabs now gathered into ragged schools have more reason to be thankful for the change than the girlhood of England and Scotland. As Mr. Cowper justly observed at Harley Street, it is the well-grounded and systematic instruction, the habit of co-ordinated study, which is so valuable to the minds of women. Our Ladies' Colleges are rapidly familiarising society with this view of female study; schools are formed for the purpose of preparing pupils for the college, and the quality of governesses is rising in full proportion to the new means of training now put within their reach. Through them, as well as by natural incitements of example and sympathy, the improvement will spread from the middle classes upwards. If aristocratic parents will not as yet send their daughters to colleges, where future governesses and professional and mercantile men's daughters study together, they will soon demand a higher

order of instruction from the exclusive schoolmistresses, governesses, and masters whom they employ. Hitherto their children have undoubtedly had the advantage in learning well what they do learn,—modern languages, English reading and writing, and the practice of the arts. Now, they must extend their scheme. . . .

I have seen something of that order of young ladies; and what I have observed obliges me to believe that they are at least as well provided with independent objects and interests as middle-class girls. One family rises up before my mind,—sensible parents and their five daughters (saying nothing here of the sons). The parents provided instruction for each girl, according to her turn and ability: and when each grew up to womanhood, she had free scope for her own pursuit. One was provided with a painting-room, and another with a music-room, and all appliances and means: a third had a conservatory and garden; and all lived in a society of the highest cultivation. They had as much as they wished of the balls and fêtes we hear so much about; and there was nothing to distinguish them from other young ladies who are now subjected to such insolent speculation from below: but I am confident that it could never have entered the head of the veriest coxcomb of their acquaintance that any of the family were speculating in marriage. Four of them married well, in the best sense, though not all grandly. The fifth died, after many years of illness. There is every reason to believe that English girls have the simplicity, intelligence, and kindliness of their order in one rank of life as in another; and certainly not least in that class which is surrounded, from its birth upwards, by an atmosphere of refinement derived from intelligence.

What, then, are they educated for? This is the great question, in their case as in that of middle-class girls.

For the most part, their education is probably a matter of sympathy and imitation. In this or that way they may best learn what every girl is expected to learn. Beyond this, there is usually but a dim notion of the object, and as little notion as elsewhere of the great single or paramount aim of education,—to raise the quality of the individual to the highest attainable point. I believe that the parents fall short of this conception, like most other parents of daughters: but I am confident that they are yet further from the other extreme,—

of universally and audaciously breeding up their daughters for the matrimonial market. One evidence that is before our eyes tells a great deal. The unmarried women of the upper classes seem to be at least as well occupied with natural and useful pursuits as those of any other rank; and more so perhaps, in proportion to their greater command of means for accomplishing their purposes and gratifying their tastes. Some may do a little mischief in attempting to do good: some may get into a foolish metaphysical school in their study of German: some may lose themselves among the religious sects of the day in the course of their polemical or antiquarian studies: but I doubt whether one could anywhere find more satisfactory specimens of single women, amiable and cheerful, because satisfied and occupied,—with friends enough for their hearts, and business enough for head and hands.

What is the truth, I wonder, about the "fast young ladies" we read so much about? I am out of the world; but I cannot find that anybody who is in it has actually seen the young ladies who talk of "awful swells" and "deuced bores," who smoke, and venture upon free discourse, and try to be like men. In Horace Walpole's time, as in Addison's, there were "fast young ladies," as we see in many a letter of Walpole's, and many a paper of the "Spectator." Probably there were some in every age, varying their doings and sayings, according to the fopperies of the time. Have we more than the average proportion? I do not know. One obvious remark on the case of the girls so freely discussed has scarcely, I think, been sufficiently made; that the two commonest allegations against them are incompatible. We hear of their atrocious extravagance in dress and peculiarity of personal habits; and, in the next breath, of their lives being one unremitting effort to obtain a husband. Now, in my long life, I have witnessed nothing like the opposition set up by men, within the last seven years, to certain modes of female dress and manners: yet the modes remain. The ladies are steady. I wish their firmness was shown in a better cause; for I admire the fashions of the day as little as any man: but it is plain that the ladies, young and old, daughters and mothers, do not try to please men in their dress and behaviour. They choose to please themselves: and, whatever we may think of their taste, we cannot but admit their spirit of independence.

On the whole, I cannot see any evidence that women of any rank are, generally speaking, educated with a view to getting married: nor yet for the purpose of being companions to men, or the mothers of heroes; nor yet for the purpose of inspiring men to great deeds, and improving society; nor yet, except in a few scattered instances, to make the most of their own individual nature. There will be less confusion of thought, and dimness of aim, when the better instructed generation grows up. Meantime, in the midst of the groping among sympathies and sentiments, and imitations, and ambitions, and imperfect views of all sorts, let us only have some few who uphold the claim of every human being to be made the most of, in all the provinces of its nature, and the female sex is redeemed. Women will quietly enter into their "rights," without objection on any hand, when those rights consist in their being more reasonable, more able, more useful, and more agreeable than ever before, without losing anything in exchange for the gain.

FROM THE MOUNTAIN

# MIDDLE-CLASS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND: GIRLS

If the education of middle-class Boys is a vague and cloudy subject to treat in writing, what is that of Girls? At first sight, the subject seems to be too chaotic to be examined on any principle or in any method at all; and perhaps the best purpose to be answered by any examination at all is that of exposing the confusion itself. In the Boys' case there is something like firm ground to stand on in the universal agreement that boys should be somehow educated, and in the old custom of mak-

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ing Latin and Greek the chief studies; but in the case of the Girls, there is no tradition, no common conviction, no established method, no imperative custom,—nothing beyond a supposition that girls must somehow learn to read and write, and to practise whatever accomplishment may be the fashion at the time. As a matter of fact, some of us have an impression that things are not so bad as they were at the beginning of the century; and there are evidences that this is true: but still, the way in which girls generally spend their time from seven years old to twenty is so desperately unfavourable to mind and character or (to speak more moderately) so inferior to what it might be, and to the way in which their grandmothers passed their precious youth, nearly as far back as we can trace them, that we may well feel a sort of despair in approaching the subject with any practical aim.

The custom of giving girls a classical education three centuries ago, ought to have settled for ever the pretended doubt whether the female intellect is adequate to the profitable study of the classics; and, as the practice was by no means confined to the aristocracy, the results should have left no room to question the benefit of such studies. But the religious struggle of the seventeenth century disturbed the natural course of women's training, as it disturbed everything else; and a manifest decline of female intelligence and manners followed the abatement of Puritanism, and the enlargement of social liberty or licence. Our grandmothers did, however, learn something well. Their parents had not fallen into the modern temptation of being ashamed of their station in life, and anxious that their children should attain a higher. The daughters were prepared to be what their mothers had been before them; and the children therefore learned early and thoroughly what their mothers could teach them. They had better health than modern children,—little as was then popularly known of sanitary truths and methods. They were more in the open air, had rougher sports, were not over-worked in their brains, and had a larger variety of occupations. In times when every woman below the highest ranks knew how to cook, to prepare medicines, to wash laces and iron cambrics, and plait shirt-frills, and manage the garden, and take care of the domestic pets, there was exercise and variety enough to counteract the mis-

chiefs of long hours at the needle, under the conditions of a high seat and a straight back, or no back at all, to the bench. What the literary pursuit of those days was, and what the spelling, and what the general cultivation of mind among young women of the middle class, their letters, and even their receipt-books show; but it was the advantage of their time that the middle classes knew what they would be at in the training of their daughters; and they mainly accomplished their purpose. Generally speaking, the girls knew no language but their own, and that only by ear and instinct; they had no conception of the meaning of any of the *ologies*, and they were rarely accomplished, except in the arts of the needle; but there was a sterling quality in what they did which ought to be taken into the account. As far as appears, nearly all the handwritings were good,—that is, legible and neat. In the domestic arts it was a disgrace to be incompetent: and the mastery of these brought with it,—as it always does and always will bring with it,—an opening and a call to that grand function of domestic administration which is at once education and the fruition of education. It was the reality of this rule in the household which gave so much character to our grandmothers, enriched them with good sense, ripened them by experience of human life and character, and helped them to some of the best results of learning. They wrote letters as good, in essential respects, as if they had been taught composition; and their conversation with their husbands, brothers, and pastors, was perhaps as good in its way as if it had had a savour of book-learning. Add to this the sound health (small-pox and fevers apart), and the natural and unconcealed relish of life, and we may ask whether the chief end of education,—the *educing* the powers of the individual—might not be nearly as well attained by that generation as by any since. It is true, it was dreadful that they misunderstood the treatment of husband or children in small-pox; it was a pity that they feared and despised everything that was foreign; it was disastrous that they supposed they held a despotism by divine right over their children and servants up to any age; it might be amusing that they thought they could have been close to an eclipse by sailing in the clouds, or that they supposed Euclid to be a Latin poet, or that they did not know where to find our colonies of Virginia and Massachu-

setts Bay on the map; but there were countervailing advantages belonging to those days and that training. The health and soundness of their neighbourhoods were sustained very much by the knowledge and skill of women who really understood the qualities and uses of vegetable medicines, and who could practise simple surgery. The doctors of those days held many of them in high respect, and committed to them the care and cure of wounds, sores, burns, dislocations, and a wide range of ordinary diseases. If they did not respect the wills of their children, they did not overtask their brains. If they held a strict rule over their servants, they took them first for pupils and then for friends; they first trained them in domestic business, and then made common cause with them in it. If they knew nothing of foreign nations and notions, they were good judges of foreign commodities; and if they were not clear as to where tea and spices and silks and shawls came from, they could appreciate them when under their hands. They no doubt inflicted some pain and fell short of much good by the narrowness of view and scantiness of intellectual culture; but they were what they were intended by their parents to be; and they were tolerably complete as far as they went and professed to go. And certainly they were less in the rear of the boys of their generation than girls are now.

Their acquirements, such as they were, were obtained at home for the most part; and further, at the writing-school, the sewing-school, or the general day-school. Then followed the period of middle-class girls' boarding-schools. There was a great expansion and multiplication of these during the war which followed the French Revolution. It was a period of high prosperity for certain middle-class interests, while so costly to the country on the whole. I need not describe it, for it was not so long ago but that we have all heard our elders speak of it if we have not ourselves witnessed the effects of it. There can be no doubt that we are suffering now from the sort of education which then became common among the farming and shopkeeping classes. As the parents made war and monopoly profits, an evil emulation entered into too many of them to rise in gentility; and one of the first methods they took was to make sportsmen of their sons, and fine ladies of their daughters. Hence the low condition of agriculture before the repeal of

the corn laws;[3] hence the deteriorated household character of women of the shopkeeping, and even the farming class for a generation past; hence the mushroom "Ladies' Seminaries" which became a byword long ago,—a representative term for false pretension, vulgarity, and cant. The complaints of dismayed parents that their girls at eighteen could do no one *thing* well, and pretended only to read a little French with difficulty, play badly on the piano, and ornament screens, are *still* fresh in our ears. How low this sort of parental vanity and filial failure descended in the gradation of the middle class could scarcely be believed by any who do not know that class well throughout. It is enough to say here that "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker," were as anxious about their girls playing a tune on the piano, and having a water-colour daub to show, as the richest tenant-farmer in the days of the sliding scale.

There has certainly been some improvement since that time,—half a century ago; and the most striking part of the improvement has been within the last half, and especially the last quarter of those fifty years. This is an encouragement to look into the present state of things,—chaotic as it appears from the highest point of view. What, then, is the state of Girls' education now?

The improvement might not be distinctly proposed half a century ago; but it can hardly be doubted that the stir was beginning. One evidence of this is that some girls of the middle class were allowed to learn Latin and Greek; and that some others who were not permitted desired it. . . . There were few women qualified to teach the dead languages; but out of that generation of pupils those ladies were to arise who have established Preparatory Schools for boys of such merit as to be considered some of the best schools in the country. Masters in our most eminent public schools have openly rejoiced over boys who have come to them from this or that Preparatory School, because the mistresses grounded the boys so well in Latin and Greek grammar.

[3] Laws designed to discourage the importation of grain, repealed in 1846. At various times the duties varied with the domestic price of grain, hence the "sliding scale" at the end of the paragraph.

At the beginning of this change, towns where there was a grammar school were usually the first scene of the experiment. Among several reasons for this, one was that the undermasters were available for teaching in families on reasonable terms. Where Latin is once fairly established as a girl's study there is sure to be presently a particularly good master ready to teach it. . . .

As there is no standard for the education of girls, and no basis of principle or consent on which to establish it, there are frequent changes of fashion or fancy in practice. On this very point there have been fluctuations down to the present hour: and no one would undertake to say what proportion of the girlhood of the country has the advantage of any classical training at all. Some of us think that the practice is more common among the aristocracy than the middle class. . . .

The social condition which just now renders the inquiry into the education of girls particularly interesting, is that the present is a period of transition for that class. Within half a century the girlhood of the upper middle class has gone through an experience of permanent historical importance. At the beginning of that time, it was assumed in ordinary practice, as in law and politics, that every woman is maintained by her father or her husband, or other male relative. . . .

At the time at which we are living, it is an indisputable fact that above two millions of the women of England are self-supporting workers: it is an admitted truth that while the customs of English society remain what they are, there must be tens of thousands of middle-class women dependent on their own industry: and it can hardly be doubtful, even to the most reluctant eyes, that the workers ought to be properly trained to the business of their lives.

The interest of the present time, then, is in its being the date of an opening of a new line of life for a considerable proportion of middle-class women; and the date therefore of a radical change in the principle and conduct of the intellectual culture of the educators of the next generation. It is settled that marriage is much less general than formerly; that while it remains so a multitude of women must work for the support of themselves, and sometimes their connexions; that the excessive badness of the girls' schools and domestic schoolrooms of

the last generation must be retrieved; and that the retrieval has been really begun in a partial way.

So much is agreed: the next question is,—What means of education are actually in use at this moment for middle-class girls?

The daughters of wealthy commoners go through much the same training as the classes above them. Those who are educated by governesses and masters at home, exclusively, may be well-mannered, and have some general culture. . . .

The "genteel" schools, which are merely an imitation of . . . [very exclusive schools]—the fantastical households in which the pupils are elegantly dressed,—probably in uniform, with a marked style of bonnet, and veils all hanging down on the same side; in which every movement is measured, and the pupils all speak alike, and walk alike, and write the same hand, and utter the same pretty sentiments. . . .

The greatest, or most conspicuous change which has taken place is in the next and far larger class of boarding-schools,—the schools filled from the manufacturers' houses, and the surgeons', and lawyers', and country-gentlemen's, and large tenant-farmers'. It is scarcely credible now what some of those schools were like during and after the critical financial period which cast so many poor ladies adrift to get their bread as they might. Those were the days when girls took their exercise, walking two and two, in melancholy procession; and not seldom with books in their hands, learning their lessons as they walked. Those were the days when half-a-dozen of them were crammed into a bedroom not airy enough for two; and when they washed their feet all round on Saturday nights with a limited supply of water and towels. Those were the days when saucy girls invented names of European capitals, and found the most extraordinary places on the map, with full approbation from a short-sighted teacher. Those were the days when the Sunday morning lesson might be learning four lines of *Paradise Lost* by heart, leaving off whether there was a stop or not. . . . Even the best of such schools, however, had its idiosyncrasy, which, during such a period of debased education, was the same thing as a drawback or defect. All the girls in such a school,—or all but the reckless and unworthy—had one style of thinking, and of expression of their thought;

or, rather, what they expressed was not thought, but sentiment. In one such school, the girls all wrote demonstrative letters; in another, the style was poetical; in another moral, or sprightly. The handwriting of one set of elderly ladies now living tells where they were educated, as does the epistolary style of another set; and the open-air gait and salutations of another, and the drawing-room manners of yet another. While this result was produced, each establishment was thus conspicuously marked as having failed of the true aim of education—however honourable, in such times, might be the comparative character and achievement of the school. . . .

The girls of the lower middle class have, all the while, had little choice and little chance. Their educational lot has been truly dreary. Wherever it can be managed, the children of small farmers, country shopkeepers, and poor professional men naturally go to a day-school, as the cheapest plan. The day-school may be good, bad, or indifferent, according to the accident of a better or worse master or mistress; but it seems to be too true that the low-priced boarding-schools for girls of that rank do the pupils more harm than good. . . .

Take a country neighbourhood, where the old-fashioned farming ways assume that the girls are to be handy in domestic business. "The girls are not what they used to be," the complaint is in such places. "The poultry don't answer as they did, nor does the dairy. The girls must have schooling; but there is no seeing what good it does; for they forget their school learning before they have been home two years; and they have all real business still to learn." A lady who happens to be fond of teaching, and who is eminently skilled in it, sees what a field there is in such a place; and she opens such a school as was never heard of before, far or near. There are other teachers besides herself—chosen for their special qualifications and their training. Among them, these ladies can teach, in the best modern methods, whatever can be useful to girls of this class, either in training their faculties—as Latin and geometry; or in expanding their range of reading and general intelligence—as the French language, History, and English literature; or in fitting them for the business of life as helpers of their parents—as writing a good hand, arithmetic, and bookkeeping, and such study of Natural Philosophy and Natural History as will at once make them more sensible

women generally, and operate favourably on their special objects, improving their dairy produce, and their poultry, and their honey, and putting them in the way of important economy in every branch of management.

There is a liberal apparatus provided; the hours are fixed considerately, to suit farmhouse ways; the girls bring their own sewing to do in the hours appropriated to genuine instruction in needlework, and cheered by pleasant readings. The terms are very low, complete and liberal as is the establishment; and those of the pupils who choose may dine there (due notice of numbers being given) for scarcely more than the cost-price of the provisions. Yet such a school as this goes a-begging. For one father and mother who appreciate it, there are half a dozen who find fault, and yet more who stand shilly-shallying till their opportunity is lost. Though aware that everybody else's daughters have for two generations past come back from school fit for neither one thing nor another, they don't know what to think of anything so new as this school. If the lady would charge half her terms for just the French, and the writing, and ciphering, with, perhaps, a little geography, and leave out all the rest, they might be glad to send their girls to her. And so the lady, having waited as long as she,—far from being poor—can afford, carries her benefits elsewhere. It is an occasional question among neighbours, whether they had not better have kept her; but she is gone, and it is no use talking now.

Take a town case. In a large, old-fashioned, but growing town, there seems to be no such thing as a school appropriate to the wants of the small shopkeeping and superior artisan class. Moreover, there is no saying when there ever was such a school; for it is the universal complaint that the domestic comfort, abilities and manners of that class are of a very low order from the defective training of the women. Their houses are not well kept; the rooms are untidy and not even clean; the ways are unpunctual; the meals are badly cooked; the clothes are badly got up; and if there is a servant, there is endless turmoil with her. The mistress says the maid does not do her work; the maid finds the mistress unreasonable and harsh; and the master and the children feel that both the charges are true. There has been so much crying out, all over the country, for something which shall be to this order of society what our

regulated and assisted schools are to the labouring class, that many good citizens and sensible women bestir themselves to see what they can do among their neighbours. Of these, one lady has an experiment of her own. She fits up and opens a convenient house, in an easily accessible situation, settles in it a mistress of high qualifications, and a housekeeper who has risen through the ranks of domestic service to be fit for the present business. Under her, the girls are to learn household work in the best style,—cleaning, cooking, laying the table, and so on; while the proper school-learning is of a better quality than can be found anywhere else within reach. When the plans are got fairly to work, there will be a regular dinner provided for the smallest payment, for girls from a distance; meantime, the lesson of laying the cloth, &c. goes on, for the sake of those who bring their dinners. This lesson is rather baulked, however, and the superiors are much vexed, by the sort of dinners disclosed,—viz. stale pastry bought with money given at home for the girls to spend as they like. This phenomenon hastens the plan for the good hot dinner at the school,—the roast leg of mutton or sirloin, with vegetables, the Irish stew, and other good things, to be cooked by the girls, in turn, in view of the table to be kept in the future home of each. But the girls have no mind for the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, or the stew, or anything else that sensible people like: they go on buying stale pastry on their way to school, and pay more for it than for the confortable dinner at their command. In a little while difficulty arises about the industrial part of the schooling. Strange to say, the mothers do not like that their daughters should learn to wash china properly, to clean furniture, rub up silver, and spread a table; and even the fathers object to any time being given to the art of cookery. On the whole, the very superior school-learning is graciously accepted, if not appreciated; but the industrial element is fatal. The pawnbroker's daughter is absent on the days when it is her turn to sweep a room or make the bread; the cabinet-maker's girls are always missing on ironing days; the linen-draper's girls cannot come any more, unless they are excused from all but book, and map, and pen work; and thus the scheme is brought to an end, the school is closed, and the husbands and children of these unhappy pupils will have to go

through the wretched old experience of domestic discomfort and wrangling, because the wife and mother does not know how to keep house.

After this review of the late and present condition of middle-class female education in England, what should we desire? what may we hope? and what should we aim at? . . .

The case of the Girls differs from that of the Boys, in the absence of all need to consider the question of appeal to the State. Probably there is nobody in England who for a moment dreams of asking the State to undertake, or to touch more or less, the education of the daughters of the most active, intelligent, practical, and domestic class of English citizens. Only a word is necessary on this head; but that word is of some importance, and at present, if ever, needing attention.

The Royal Commissioners on Education reported, three years since, in favour of applying to the improvement of education the incomes of charities which have become by lapse of time useless or pernicious. The annual amount thus proposed to be transferred exceeds 100,000£. In considering how such a sum would be best applied, attention was fixed on the proportion of girls to boys profiting, really or ostensibly, by old educational endowment. In common endowed schools, the girls are little more than half as many as the boys; and in grammar-schools they are only a tenth of the scholars. After the appearance of the Commissioners' Report, it was strongly urged by some sensible people that the great new educational want which had arisen since those old bequests were made, should be first attended to in the disposal of this fund, viz. the need among middle-class women of an education for teaching. Model schools—training schools—of this character are an urgent want of the time and of the country; and something of the sort was claimed for the sex, on the unquestionable ground that the charities to be superseded were for the equal benefit of men and women, and that it would be a manifest unfairness to apply the income for the benefit of boys alone. At that very time, an income from land bequeathed in an old century to needy persons of both sexes was used, under the sanction of the Court of Chancery, for the erection of a school for boys exclusively. If this example were to be followed all over the country while there is no provision for instructing and train-

ing middle-class women as teachers, and while many counties of England contain no endowed schools at all for girls, it would be as pitiful a cowardice on the one hand as it would be an insolent aggression on the other to permit such a thing to be done. It is one thing to beg from the State help which would involve subservience to State administration in a matter of which Government is not a particularly good judge; and it is another thing to claim from Government a just share of existing funds, to be applied under conditions agreed upon. Repugnant to English notions and feelings as would be a system of public-school education for girls, under the management of the Government, or any ecclesiastical party, or a joint-stock company, there can be no doubt of the eagerness with which the establishment of a few model and training schools of a high order would be hailed by women whose lot is to work, and who need a good education for the purpose. It will be a cruel injustice if they are denied their fair share of funds intended for the aid of equal numbers of men and women.

Even in the three years which have passed since the Commissioners reported, advances have been made in female education which have produced a great change of feeling. The timid can now hear the mention of things which sounded very terrible even so short a time ago; and the chances of a really good education becoming attainable are so far improved.

Let it be understood at once that in claiming for middle-class girls a substantial and liberal development and training of the mind, and, for those who desire it, a special preparation for the educational or other profession in life, nobody contemplates the use of any method which is not in accordance with national custom and English feelings. . . .

Both French and Americans, but particularly the latter, teach us that there is nothing insuperable in the greatest seeming difficulty about girls,—the difficulty which makes the main difference between their case and that of boys,—the claim of the household arts as an essential part of education. Boys have two things to divide their days between: study and play. Girls have three: study, the domestic arts, and play. At boarding-school the domestic training is dropped out of the life altogether; and a home life, without any school at all, almost nullifies study. Here is the dilemma. But French and American

women excel our middle-class women in both departments. How do they manage it?

How it may be in the French household, I do not know; but in the American it is a matter of course for little girls to be much more useful than damsels of double their age are in England. I never could make out why English little girls are not gratified in their liking for housekeeping from the beginning. Every healthy and happy child enjoys the dignity and amusement of household business, unless it be the early stage of needlework. There seems to be no reason why she should not know perfectly well how things should be done, and be familiar with the doing of them, before the boarding-school time arrives. If this is not made secure, boarding-school is so far an evil. A girl who at seventeen has everything to learn about the shopping, and the management of the table, and nursing the sick, and the economy of the house, is at a disadvantage which she will hardly get over. We see much of this among our middle-class brides, who feel it a heavy care on their minds that they have no confidence and no knowledge about housekeeping. It is well if they do not grow afraid of their husbands; they are certainly afraid of their husbands' family, and of their own servants; and all for want of simple knowledge and skill which they ought to have attained before they went to school. The deficiency of domestic service in America, and the habits of society, preclude this mischief; and it may be taken for granted that ladies who obtain their diploma as physicians, and who read Greek plays, and who thoroughly understand the Differential Calculus are as dexterous in making beds, and turning out a good batch of bread and pies, and administering medicines and blisters, as ever their grandmothers were.

With us the best chance seems to be for those who are within reach of a first-class day-school, or of one of the colleges which are springing up among us. A combination of the domestic and academical life is a very high privilege indeed. Where this cannot be had, the domestic training should, in the first place, be given to such an extent as that it can never be lost, and may be easily resumed on the verge of womanhood. But there is a happy possibility opening before us, through the recent discoveries of the benefits of half-time in school work.

Inspectors declare that in schools where boys have given six hours per day to book-work, while the girls have spent three in book-work, and three in sewing and other domestic arts, the girls are by no means behind the boys in attainments. Before this discovery, girls had benefited by the new lights (very old lights, disastrously eclipsed for a time) on the necessity of play and of a sensible care of the bodily frame. Instead of the pale-faced, languid, crooked, fretful type of school-girl, we now have before our eyes the well-grown and well-exercised young maiden who is excellent at ball play and the skipping-rope in its advanced stages, and archery; and if at gymnastics and foot races and swimming, so much the better. This is a vast improvement; but there may be room for another; for the appropriation of a part of the day to domestic business. Where girls board together in a house, under the superintendence of a lady, for the object of attending a school or college, this kind of training might surely go on together with the book study; and if in large boarding-schools the thing cannot be done—this is, as I have said, so far an objection to that mode of education. As the praise and adoption of the half-time method spread, means may be found of administering a complete feminine training, so as to save governesses and other professional women from an ignorance and inaptitude as disadvantageous to their purse as to their dignity and peace of mind. It is to no purpose saying that intellectual women should leave the housekeeping to servants, and that the sewing-machine puts the needle out of court altogether. The truth is, that servants cannot do their work well under any mistress but one who understands their business at least as well as they do. It is also true that a change has come over the servant-maid class, throughout the country—a change which we need not discuss here, but which renders the capacity for domestic administration more than ever necessary to middle-class women. And it is true, again, that the sewing-machine is useless in hands which are not thoroughly skilled in sewing without the machine. Under all circumstances, therefore, let middle-class parents regard household qualifications as sacred, not to be encroached upon or slighted for the sake of any other attainments whatever.

This being understood and admitted, it does not appear that there is any limit to what women may desire and attempt

to learn. The case of the dead languages was settled as soon as the objectors were brought to state their objections.

*Q*. "What should women do with their Latin and Greek when they enter on practical life?"

*A*. "That is exactly the objection made to the amount of time spent on the classics by boys in public schools. When they become members of Parliament, or physicians, or manufacturers, or shopkeepers, we are told, they never open a Greek or Latin book again."

*Q*. "But the literature, beyond the school range, is not the only, nor the main, consideration. It is the exercise and discipline of the faculties in the study of the languages which is the inestimable benefit."

*A*. "Very well, so be it: and this is the very best argument in favour of a sound classical training for girls. If women are usually slovenly in thought, inaccurate in intellectual perception, and weak in reasoning, they should be more and not less exercised in processes which will remedy their defects."

This is so clear that the claim of the female mind to instruction in the classics and mathematics will not be again denied by sensible people of either sex. And they have equally firm ground to stand upon in regard to every other kind of knowledge which is open to anybody.

That this is widely admitted appears by the rapidity with which the resources for female education are extending.

The *Scottish Institution* at Edinburgh has gone through thirty sessions. It was probably the first attempt to combine the advantages of the boarding and day school with the privileges of a collegiate system. There is no doubt that a large number of middle-class women have obtained a high order of education there; but the general impression seems to be that there are mistakes in the scheme—such as prize-giving, and a public distribution of honours—which operate mischievously. Studious or clever girls engross most of the benefits; pursuits are determined, and studies urged in an arbitrary way by these prizes and honours; and girls of slow-moving minds—*often* the best quality of mind—have no chance under the pressure of the system, while idle ones have no appropriate stimulus, and reckless ones no check. All this may naturally

be true in an institution so new and strange as this great school was in its early days; and there must always be grave drawbacks in a scheme which involves public prize-giving to girls. But it was a great day for the sex when such ranges of study were thrown open to women as are under the charge of the professors of the *Scottish Institution*. They offer Latin and three modern languages; and, besides the ordinary school studies, mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural history, and scientific instruction in music. Lectures on scientific and literary subjects give a still further collegiate character to the place and its work.

The two colleges in London, *Queen's College* in Harley Street, with its Preparatory School, and the *Ladies' College* in Bedford Square, were striking signs of the times in their institution, and are becoming more and more so in their success. They were sure to bring out all the weaknesses and vices of the popular mind in regard to female education, and to raise up a host of enemies, and treacherous or mischievous friends; and their gradual triumph over such opposition and embarrassment is a sufficient assurance that the cause is safe. If a full disclosure could be made of the experience of the conductors in regard to the applications and criticisms of parents and guardians, one wonders what proportion of the middle class would be astonished, and how many more would be astonished at their astonishment. One wonders whether these colleges have brought into notice all the fathers who grumble over paying five-pound notes for their daughters' education, while cheerfully spending hundreds a year for their boys, at Eton or Harrow. One wonders where the perplexity is when the father first tells his girls that he can give them no fortune whatever, because their brothers cost him so much, and then declares in their hearing that he can't see what women want, beyond what they might easily pick up at home. One wonders whether he ever considers what is to become of them if he dies untimely, leaving them without a maintenance, and without education wherewith to gain one. One wonders how much dread of the father operates on the mother when she slily and yet audaciously manoeuvres to get two girls into a course for the fees of one; or contrives to introduce the governess "just to sit by during the lessons," so that she may learn without pay, and save sending the younger girls at all. Things like these on

the one hand, and, on the other, the honest eagerness of the young pupils themselves, and of grown women who enter as pupils, afford guidance and stimulus to all who witness them. So does the generous zeal of the professors. Those who desire a high order of instruction for girls, whether women and girls, or parents and friends, or patriots and philosophers, should persist in the demand; and the right answer will come. Not all the ignorance, the jealousy, the meanness, the prudery, or the profligate selfishness which is to be found from end to end of the middle class, can now reverse the destiny of the English girl, or retard that ennobling of the sex which is a natural consequence of its becoming wiser and more independent, while more accomplished, gracious, and companionable. The briars and brambles are cleared away from the women's avenue to the temple of knowledge. Now they have only to knock, and it will be opened to them.

The examinations which female students may now command are a sufficient warrant for saying this. The mere knowledge that there is a spirit of superintendence abroad, that there is any system of testing in existence, any means of verification by which female students may ascertain their own standing, is an effectual assurance to them of justice at the hands of their instructors; and accordingly we find a striking improvement from year to year in the spelling, arithmetic, and other ordinary studies of school-girls who come under the examinations of the Society of Arts. There is now an ascending scale of examinations, of one kind or another, till we arrive at that professional testing from which Miss Garrett[4] has come out qualified and certified as a medical practitioner. Of all the kinds of examination now at the service of female students, none are more valuable than those belonging to the Harley Street and Bedford Square Colleges, by which certificates of proficiency in learning are obtainable by women proposing to be educators, or professional workers in one way or another. The entrance thus opened to such a career, and thus zealously sought, the first step in the great reform is securely taken. The State, however well-disposed, could do nothing for the middle-class

[4] Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836–1917), pioneer British physician, advocate of opening the professions to women, first woman to serve as a mayor in England.

that could compare in value with what has been done by a very small portion of that class for itself. The State could not so well judge of its wants,—could not so wisely provide the agency of instruction needed,—could not so touch and fire the great heart of the nation as this spontaneous effort will soon be seen to have touched and fired it. Let the members of that great middle class help one another from year to year to ascertain distinctly what education they desire for their daughters, and they can have it to their wish. Last year an experiment of immense significance was tried in the extension of the Cambridge examination, framed for boys, to the case of girls. At the short notice of a fortnight, eighty-one entered their names; and they went through with it admirably. In the quietest way, and in the privacy of silent school-rooms, these girls did their work, in the presence of friendly ladies who sat with them to certify to the propriety and fair play of the whole procedure. To use the words of the committee, "In every point of view, the experiment was completely successful." As students, teachers, friends, and patriotic observers all desire that this "might be the first step towards the establishment of a regular and permanent system," it is reasonable to expect to see principle and method introduced into the chaos from which something like order is beginning to arise, and even the next generation much better qualified than the present and the last to justify and confirm the traditional lofty and benign reputation of the womanhood of England.