

SEX IN EDUCATION.

PART I.

INTRODUCTORY.

“Is there any thing better in a State than that both women and men be rendered the very best? There is not.” —
PLATO.

It is idle to say that what is right for man is wrong for woman. Pure reason, abstract right and wrong, have nothing to do with sex: they neither recognize nor know it. They teach that what is right or wrong for man is equally right and wrong for woman. Both sexes are bound by the same code of morals; both are amenable to the same divine law. Both have a right to do the best they can; or, to speak more justly, both should feel the duty, and have the opportunity, to do their

best. Each must justify its existence by becoming a complete development of manhood and womanhood; and each should refuse whatever limits or dwarfs that development.

The problem of woman's sphere, to use the modern phrase, is not to be solved by applying to it abstract principles of right and wrong. Its solution must be obtained from physiology, not from ethics or metaphysics. The question must be submitted to Agassiz and Huxley, not to Kant or Calvin, to Church or Pope. Without denying the self-evident proposition, that whatever a woman can do, she has a right to do, the question at once arises, What can she do? And this includes the further question, What can she best do? A girl can hold a plough, and ply a needle, after a fashion. If she can do both better than a man, she ought to be both farmer and seamstress; but if, on the whole, her husband can hold best the plough, and she ply best the needle, they should divide the labor. He should be master of the plough, and she mistress of the loom. The *questio vexata* of woman's sphere

will be decided by her organization. This limits her power, and reveals her divinely-appointed tasks, just as man's organization limits his power, and reveals his work. In the development of the organization is to be found the way of strength and power for both sexes. Limitation or abortion of development leads both to weakness and failure.

Neither is there any such thing as inferiority or superiority in this matter. Man is not superior to woman, nor woman to man. The relation of the sexes is one of equality, not of better and worse, or of higher and lower. By this it is not intended to say that the sexes are the same. They are different, widely different from each other, and so different that each can do, in certain directions, what the other cannot; and in other directions, where both can do the same things, one sex, as a rule, can do them better than the other; and in still other matters they seem to be so nearly alike, that they can interchange labor without perceptible difference. All this is so well known, that it would be useless to refer to it,

were it not that much of the discussion of the irrepressible woman-question, and many of the efforts for bettering her education and widening her sphere, seem to ignore any difference of the sexes; seem to treat her as if she were identical with man, and to be trained in precisely the same way; as if her organization, and consequently her function, were masculine, not feminine. There are those who write and act as if their object were to assimilate woman as much as possible to man, by dropping all that is distinctively feminine out of her, and putting into her as large an amount of masculineness as possible. These persons tacitly admit the error just alluded to, that woman is inferior to man, and strive to get rid of the inferiority by making her a man. There may be some subtle physiological basis for such views—some strange quality of brain; for some who hold and advocate them are of those, who, having missed the symmetry and organic balance that harmonious development yields, have drifted into an hermaphroditic condition. One of this

class, who was glad to have escaped the chains of matrimony, but knew the value and lamented the loss of maternity, wished she had been born a widow with two children. These misconceptions arise from mistaking difference of organization and function for difference of position in the scale of being, which is equivalent to saying that man is rated higher in the divine order because he has more muscle, and woman lower because she has more fat. The loftiest ideal of humanity, rejecting all comparisons of inferiority and superiority between the sexes, demands that each shall be perfect in its kind, and not be hindered in its best work. The lily is not inferior to the rose, nor the oak superior to the clover: yet the glory of the lily is one, and the glory of the oak is another; and the use of the oak is not the use of the clover. That is poor horticulture which would train them all alike.

When Col. Higginson asked, not long ago, in one of his charming essays, that almost persuade the reader, "Ought women to learn

the alphabet?" and added, "Give woman, if you dare, the alphabet, then summon her to the career," his physiology was not equal to his wit. Women will learn the alphabet at any rate; and man will be powerless to prevent them, should he undertake so ungracious a task. The real question is not, *Shall* women learn the alphabet? but *How* shall they learn it? In this case, how is more important than ought or shall. The principle and duty are not denied. The method is not so plain.

The fact that women have often equalled and sometimes excelled men in physical labor, intellectual effort, and lofty heroism, is sufficient proof that women have muscle, mind, and soul, as well as men; but it is no proof that they have had, or should have, the same kind of training; nor is it any proof that they are destined for the same career as men. The presumption is, that if woman, subjected to a masculine training, arranged for the development of a masculine organization, can equal man, she ought to excel him if educated by a feminine training, arranged to develop a

feminine organization. Indeed, I have somewhere encountered an author who boldly affirms the superiority of women to all existences on this planet, because of the complexity of their organization. Without undertaking to indorse such an opinion, it may be affirmed, that an appropriate method of education for girls — one that should not ignore the mechanism of their bodies or blight any of their vital organs — would yield a better result than the world has yet seen.

Gail Hamilton's statement is true, that, "a girl can go to school, pursue all the studies which Dr. Todd enumerates, except *ad infinitum*; know them, not as well as a chemist knows chemistry or a botanist botany, but as well as they are known by boys of her age and training, as well, indeed, as they are known by many college-taught men, enough, at least, to be a solace and a resource to her; then graduate before she is eighteen, and come out of school as healthy, as fresh, as eager, as she went in."* But it is not true

* Woman's Wrongs, p. 59.

that she can do all this, and retain uninjured health and a future secure from neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, and other derangements of the nervous system, if she follows the same method that boys are trained in. Boys must study and work in a boy's way, and girls in a girl's way. They may study the same books, and attain an equal result, but should not follow the same method. Mary can master Virgil and Euclid as well as George; but both will be dwarfed, — defrauded of their rightful attainment, — if both are confined to the same methods. It is said that Elena Cornaro, the accomplished professor of six languages, whose statue adorns and honors Padua, was educated like a boy. This means that she was initiated into, and mastered, the studies that were considered to be the peculiar dower of men. It does not mean that her life was a man's life, her way of study a man's way of study, or that, in acquiring six languages, she ignored her own organization. Women who choose to do so can master the humanities and the mathematics, encounter

the labor of the law and the pulpit, endure the hardness of physic and the conflicts of politics ; but they must do it all in woman's way, not in man's way. In all their work they must respect their own organization, and remain women, not strive to be men, or they will ignominiously fail. For both sexes, there is no exception to the law, that their greatest power and largest attainment lie in the perfect development of their organization. "Woman," says a late writer, "must be regarded as woman, not as a nondescript animal, with greater or less capacity for assimilation to man." If we would give our girls a fair chance, and see them become and do their best by reaching after and attaining an ideal beauty and power, which shall be a crown of glory and a tower of strength to the republic, we must look after their complete development as women. Wherein they are men, they should be educated as men ; wherein they are women, they should be educated as women. The physiological motto is, Educate a man for manhood, a woman for womanhood, both for humanity. In this lies the hope of the race.

Perhaps it should be mentioned in this connection, that, throughout this paper, education is not used in the limited and technical sense of intellectual or mental training alone. By saying there is a boy's way of study and a girl's way of study, it is not asserted that the intellectual process which masters Juvenal, German, or chemistry, is different for the two sexes. Education is here intended to include what its etymology indicates, the drawing out and development of every part of the system; and this necessarily includes the whole manner of life, physical and psychical, during the educational period. "Education," says Worcester, "comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits, of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations." It has been and is the misfortune of this country, and particularly of New England, that education, stripped of this, its proper signification, has popularly stood for studying, without regard to the physical

training or no training that the schools afford. The cerebral processes by which the acquisition of knowledge is made are the same for each sex; but the mode of life which gives the finest nurture to the brain, and so enables those processes to yield their best result, is not the same for each sex. The best educational training for a boy is not the best for a girl, nor that for a girl best for a boy.

The delicate bloom, early but rapidly fading beauty, and singular pallor of American girls and women have almost passed into a proverb. The first observation of a European that lands upon our shores is, that our women are a feeble race; and, if he is a physiological observer, he is sure to add, They will give birth to a feeble race, not of women only, but of men as well. "I never saw before so many pretty girls together," said Lady Amberley to the writer, after a visit to the public schools of Boston; and then added, "They all looked sick." Circumstances have repeatedly carried me to Europe, where I am always surprised by the red blood that fills

and colors the faces of ladies and peasant girls, reminding one of the canvas of Rubens and Murillo; and am always equally surprised on my return, by crowds of pale, bloodless female faces, that suggest consumption, scrofula, anemia, and neuralgia. To a large extent, our present system of educating girls is the cause of this palor and weakness. How our schools, through their methods of education, contribute to this unfortunate result, and how our colleges that have undertaken to educate girls like boys, that is, in the same way, have succeeded in intensifying the evils of the schools, will be pointed out in another place.

It has just been said that the educational methods of our schools and colleges for girls are, to a large extent, the cause of "the thousand ills" that beset American women. Let it be remembered that this is not asserting that such methods of education are the sole cause of female weaknesses, but only that they are one cause, and one of the most important causes of it. An immense loss of

female power may be fairly charged to irrational cooking and indigestible diet. We live in the zone of perpetual pie and doughnut; and our girls revel in those unassimilable abominations. Much also may be credited to artificial deformities strapped to the spine, or piled on the head, much to corsets and skirts, and as much to the omission of clothing where it is needed as to excess where the body does not require it; but, after the amplest allowance for these as causes of weakness, there remains a large margin of disease unaccounted for. Those grievous maladies which torture a woman's earthly existence, called leucorrhœa, amenorrhœa, dysmenorrhœa, chronic and acute ovaritis, prolapsus uteri, hysteria, neuralgia, and the like, are indirectly affected by food, clothing, and exercise; they are directly and largely affected by the causes that will be presently pointed out, and which arise from a neglect of the peculiarities of a woman's organization. The regimen of our schools fosters this neglect. The regimen of a college arranged for

boys, if imposed on girls, would foster it still more.

The scope of this paper does not permit the discussion of these other causes of female weaknesses. Its object is to call attention to the errors of physical training that have crept into, and twined themselves about, our ways of educating girls, both in public and private schools, and which now threaten to attain a larger development, and inflict a consequently greater injury, by their introduction into colleges and large seminaries of learning, that have adopted, or are preparing to adopt, the co-education of the sexes. Even if there were space to do so, it would not be necessary to discuss here the other causes alluded to. They are receiving the amplest attention elsewhere. The gifted authoress of "The Gates Ajar" has blown her trumpet with no uncertain sound, in explanation and advocacy of a new-clothes philosophy, which her sisters will do well to heed rather than to ridicule. It would be a blessing to the race, if some inspired prophet of clothes would ap-

pear, who should teach the coming woman how, in pharmaceutical phrase, to fit, put on, wear, and take off her dress, —

“Cito, Tuto, et Jucunde.”

Corsets that embrace the waist with a grip that tightens respiration into pain, and skirts that weight the hips with heavier than maternal burdens, have often caused grievous maladies, and imposed a needless invalidism. Yet, recognizing all this, it must not be forgotten that breeches do not make a man, nor the want of them unmake a woman.

Let the statement be emphasized and reiterated until it is heeded, that woman's neglect of her own organization, though not the sole explanation and cause of her many weaknesses, more than any single cause, adds to their number, and intensifies their power. It limits and lowers her action very much, as man is limited and degraded by dissipation. The saddest part of it all is, that this neglect of herself in girlhood, when her organization is ductile and impressible, breeds the germs

of diseases that in later life yield torturing or fatal maladies. Every physician's notebook affords copious illustrations of these statements. The number of them which the writer has seen prompted this imperfect essay upon a subject in which the public has a most vital interest, and with regard to which it acts with the courage of ignorance.

Two considerations deserve to be mentioned in this connection. One is, that no organ or function in plant, animal, or human kind, can be properly regarded as a disability or source of weakness. Through ignorance or misdirection, it may limit or enfeeble the animal or being that misguides it; but, rightly guided and developed, it is either in itself a source of power and grace to its parent stock, or a necessary stage in the development of larger grace and power. The female organization is no exception to this law; nor are the particular set of organs and their functions with which this essay has to deal an exception to it. The periodical movements which characterize and influence woman's structure for

more than half her terrestrial life, and which, in their ebb and flow, sway every fibre and thrill every nerve of her body a dozen times a year, and the occasional pregnancies which test her material resources, and cradle the race, are, or are evidently intended to be, fountains of power, not hinderances, to her. They are not infrequently spoken of by women themselves with half-smothered anathemas; often endured only as a necessary evil and sign of inferiority; and commonly ignored, till some steadily-advancing malady whips the recalcitrant sufferer into acknowledgment of their power, and respect for their function. All this is a sad mistake. It is a foolish and criminal delicacy that has persuaded woman to be so ashamed of the temple God built for her as to neglect one of its most important services. On account of this neglect, each succeeding generation, obedient to the law of hereditary transmission, has become feebler than its predecessor. Our great-grandmothers are pointed at as types of female physical excellence; their

great-grand-daughters as illustrations of female physical degeneracy. There is consolation, however, in the hope, based on substantial physiological data, that our great-grand-daughters may recapture their ancestors' bloom and force. "Three generations of wholesome life," says Mr. Greg, "might suffice to eliminate the ancestral poison, for the *vis medicatrix naturæ* has wonderful efficacy when allowed free play; and perhaps the time may come when the worst cases shall deem it a plain duty to curse no future generations with the *damnosa hereditas*, which has caused such bitter wretchedness to themselves." *

The second consideration is the acknowledged influence of beauty. "When one sees a god-like countenance," said Socrates to Phædrus, "or some bodily form that represents beauty, he reverences it as a god, and would sacrifice to it." From the days of Plato till now, all have felt the power of woman's beauty, and been more than willing

* Enigmas of Life, p. 34.

to sacrifice to it. The proper, not exclusive search for it is a legitimate inspiration. The way for a girl to obtain her portion of this radiant halo is by the symmetrical development of every part of her organization, muscle, ovary, stomach and nerve, and by a physiological management of every function that correlates every organ; not by neglecting or trying to stifle or abort any of the vital and integral parts of her structure, and supplying the deficiency by invoking the aid of the milliner's stuffing, the colorist's pencil, the druggist's compounds, the doctor's pelvic supporter, and the surgeon's spinal brace.

When travelling in the East, some years ago, it was my fortune to be summoned as a physician into a harem. With curious and not unwilling step I obeyed the summons. While examining the patient, nearly a dozen Syrian girls — a grave Turk's wifely crowd, a result and illustration of Mohammedan female education — pressed around the divan with eyes and ears intent to see and hear a Western Hakim's medical examination. As I looked

upon their well-developed forms, their brown skins, rich with the blood and sun of the East, and their unintelligent, sensuous faces, I thought that if it were possible to marry the Oriental care of woman's organization to the Western liberty and culture of her brain, there would be a new birth and loftier type of womanly grace and force.