

PHYSICAL HINDRANCES TO TEACHING GIRLS.

EIGHTEEN years ago, when Dr. Clarke's "Sex in Education" * was published, it aroused anxious questionings and indignant protests. Vassar College was then only eight years old. Many felt that possibly Dr. Clarke might be right in his conclusions regarding women; at any rate, they could not prove that he was wrong. On the other hand, those that protested had only general principles and few and possibly inconclusive experiments upon which to base their dissent. If the little book had appeared in 1891 instead of in 1873, a host of vigorous college *alumnae* from Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, Cornell, Girton, and Newnham, might have revived the memory of their Harkness to answer: "*Usus magister optimus est.*" Good doctor, look at us! Look at the statistics published in a recent number of the "Century" magazine for information concerning our health as compared with the health of our sisters who are not college-bred!

But however the case may stand with college women, were Dr. Clarke alive, and were he the attending physician at most private schools for girls, where he could see with what wear and tear of the flesh, in many cases, any attempt at thorough work is attended, he would be confirmed in his conclusions. And if the teachers in private schools did not have before them the experience of the colleges for women, they might be tempted to answer, Yes, you are right. One must choose between a healthy animal and an educated invalid. What may be the experience of public schools, it is not the purpose of this article to consider. It will confine itself to private schools—to thorough private schools, because only in them comes any demand upon brain and soul—and to the more expensive private schools, because there we find girls of our wealthy leisure class, girls whose intellectual training has received a very small share of public attention. It is not strange, indeed, that during these twenty-six revolutionary years of education for women, the college girl should have monopolized public attention; but now that women's colleges are no longer an experiment, it is time that some thought be given to the girls for

* "Sex in Education," by Edward H. Clarke (Boston, 1873).

whose mental equipment the private school is responsible. That these girls form a large and important class no one can deny; a class much larger—more the pity—than the class that goes forth from our colleges. They go early into “society,” and most of them have no other aim than to secure a husband and an establishment. In this ambition they are usually, sooner or later, successful. Now, at this stage of the world’s progress, every such girl, whether she will or not, has in her keeping a great responsibility. Around her are the discontented masses, watching to see what the rich ladies and gentlemen will do next. What will the rich lady do? By her sumptuous living, and her pleasure-seeking, and her extravagance, by her conscious or unconscious lowering of her husband’s standards of right and duty, will she throw her influence in the wrong way? Or will she bring a trained intelligence, a wise self-sacrifice, and a consecrated womanly tact, to aid in the social task of the time? One or the other, of course, she must do. The veriest nonentity that ever bore the name of woman, if she did nothing worse, blunted the keenness of some man’s spiritual sense, made it harder for him, with her before his eyes, to believe the best of himself and his kind, and to hold himself to his faith.

It is not an unheard of thing for these girls to leave school with no more mental development than a child of twelve. Why? Often because they are not considered well enough to endure school work. This is, of course, by no means always even the ostensible reason. But the plea of ill-health is urged with sufficient frequency and reason to demand serious consideration. It has seemed impossible to gather statistics in regard to the health of girls in private schools; indeed, such statistics might be of little value, but the testimony of the few teachers that have responded to requests for information—and their schools probably have no monopoly of the invalids—bears sad witness to the weak physical condition of the girls of our leisure class. Leaving out of the account the day pupils, whose dressmakers, dancing-schools, church-fairs, and social engagements add unfavorable complications, one finds that the health of the family students in girls’ private schools is such as to make thorough intellectual work extremely difficult. Yet the conditions of a well-ordered home-school are not of a nature to wear upon a girl of moderate physical and mental endurance. Breakfast at half-past seven; a short walk before school at a quarter of nine; recitations, music, and study, interrupted by recess and light gymnastics, until half-past one; then luncheon, a little rest, a brisk walk or tennis; two and a half hours more of vigorous

study and music, followed by half an hour's gymnastics; dinner, an evening when no studying but only good reading or play is permitted; bed at half-past nine for nine hours—surely, there is nothing in this routine to induce nervous prostration. Yet it is the exception rather than the rule that half the pupils, though they may not call themselves invalids, are in a physical condition to endure it. Even in schools that refuse to accept girls unless there is a reasonable chance of their getting through the year, it is not unusual for one-third to be entered by their parents with the warning that their daughters are delicate and will need special consideration and watching—a warning in all probability followed by the request that they shall not be “bothered with mathematics.” These weakly ones, if their mothers leave them alone, and if they themselves become interested in their work, by dint of three or four extra hours for rest and exercise, manage to hold out through the year, and frequently end it in improved health. But unless these two conditions are fulfilled they often fall by the way. Nervousness, backache, weakness, loss of appetite, generally follow soon upon the realization that school means work. A hard lesson to be mastered lays a girl low with a headache or dissolves her in floods of tears. Tears, indeed, especially during the first part of the year, are of daily downfall. Tears bedew knotty problems, tears greet the refusal to allow boxes of candy, tears fall copiously when overshoes are insisted upon and when short fur capes are declared insufficient covering for zero weather. Moreover, let the fun run a bit too high, or a mischievous boy tap on the window in the evening, or a mouse suddenly appear, and only a dose of plain English and the valerian bottle prevent an epidemic of hysterics.

But there needs no chorus of school teachers to tell us that our leisure-class girls are lacking in physical endurance and self-control. Most men with a bank account need look no farther than their own and their neighbors' physicians' bills to find abundant confirmation of the fact. Neither is it necessary to dwell long upon the results. They, also, are but too painfully apparent. The mother and the family physician usually agree that the delicate girl must be taken from school. This decision means, in most cases, the end of her intellectual training. A trip to Europe, a little dabbling in music and china-painting, possibly “private lessons” in French and literature—and the young lady is “educated.” She knows nothing of the delight in mental activity; her taste for good literature is barely aroused, if aroused at all; she is stone blind to the world of nature and of art;

her brain is about as well fitted to wrestle with hard thinking as the brain of her pet kitten. With her untrained mind, her aches and her nerves, her tears and her hysterics, she mounts the throne in some rich man's kingdom. Does it require a seer to tell how she will govern?

Now, surely, no one, remembering Catherine Booth, and Florence Nightingale, and the unnumbered multitudes of humbler heroic souls, will assert that girls go down before difficulties and shed weak tears over senseless woes because they belong to womankind, whom God made that way. Neither is it natural that a girl of usual healthfulness should become painfully aware that she has a head or a nervous system, as soon as she is called upon to learn a French verb or to solve a problem in fractions. She may hate to study; most likely she does if she has been as unwisely "educated" as most leisure-class girls are, but that alone is not sufficient to explain the ills of the flesh that attend her first efforts to master intellectual difficulties. Some of her discomfort is often, no doubt, imaginary; but even after deducting what she imagines and what she may, if she be not honest, assume for the occasion, we find enough real trouble to arouse anxious questionings as to its cause. Dr. Clarke thought he had found it in the way Nature makes woman. But may it not be possible that these girls are what they are, not because Nature made them so, but because they made themselves so?

It is no simple task to explain this too prevalent physical weakness of the private-school girls. We should need to know not only all their personal history, but the personal history also of their ancestors for several generations, before we could be sure that we had all the data for sound conclusions. There are certain patent facts, however, in the bringing up of girls, that present themselves as a partial explanation of the evil. Putting aside heredity and pre-natal conditions, which, in some cases, may be sufficient to account for all the trouble, but which should be no more operative with daughters than with sons, we see that the girl is very early subject to conditions quite different from the boy's. She is much more confined in the house, she is not supposed to keep arms and legs flying as a boy does, and too soon she is put into clothes whose discomfort her brother would not endure for a day. Imagine him in her stiff, tight corset, and with her heavy skirts dragging upon back and abdomen! Send him out on a cold winter day in her thin-soled kid boots, short-sleeved flannels, and little fur cape that muffles her throat and leaves exposed her arms and most of her body; let him come home to sit over the register and feed on

candy, strong coffee, and cake; then be surprised, if you can, when he finds it difficult to learn his next day's lessons. It is perfectly true that some delicate girls commit not one of these crimes against the flesh; they are shod, and clad, and fed according to the most approved hygienic methods, and still they are not well; but by far the greater number are guilty of them all. Add to these offences the early indulgence in evening pleasures, permitted to most American girls—their clubs, their kirmesses, theatres, and parties, with their attendant evils of nervous excitement and loss of sleep, and is it to be wondered that outraged Nature exacts her penalty?

Perhaps, however, one of the most potent causes of the girl's unfitness for intellectual work is to be found in the different standards of life and achievement set for the son and the daughter. We have not yet wholly emerged from barbarism, in spite of our twenty-six years of women's colleges. It will take many a year yet, many a strong, sweet, wise woman, many a patient struggle on the part of school and college, before we shall be wholly rid of the idea that it makes no difference how a girl is educated. To many fathers and mothers a daughter is still only a pretty thing to be petted in their home—"company" for them, until she goes to be the Nora of her own "Doll's House." "Why should she bother herself with arithmetic, or Latin, or anything else that is difficult? She will never use it; she will never have to earn her own living. If she doesn't care to go to school, let her stay at home," so say her parents. Because it is not a matter of dollars and cents, and because some of us, even in this year of grace, have not advanced one whit beyond the standard of the Miltonic Eve, the education of a large class of girls is still a thing of whims. We need not wonder, then, if, bred in such an atmosphere, the girl allows the most diminutive pain to interrupt her school work.

Physicians, also, are largely to blame for this arrested mental development. Too many of them fail, as they would never think of failing in the case of a boy, to recognize that all human beings, girls included, are dual-natured. In their care for the body they overlook the mind. The first prescription of a large number is, "Take the girl out of school." One physician—in Boston, too—went so far as to add, "And don't make her do anything that she doesn't wish to do." As this was said in the presence of the young woman herself, who was by nature not strongly inclined to activity, the result may be imagined. The pernicious effect of that physician's words was manifest in everything that she did. The slightest discomfort was to her sufficient

reason for shutting her books and retiring to idleness and the bed; and if it was suggested that, as a woman, she would probably sometimes find it necessary to do some things when she did not feel quite well, and that it might be wise for her, as a girl, to acquire some practice in that art, she regarded such a suggestion as stony-hearted. Physicians—not all, happily—seem to forget, when they treat a girl, that, small and weak though her mind may be, it must busy itself with something. Take away from it all healthy work, and, ten chances to one, it will expend its energy in thinking how many aches and woes its owner has—a questionable remedy, certainly. Neither do physicians seem to remember that if they keep a girl out of school between the ages of twelve and sixteen, she is likely to be ashamed to go back to school, if she be well enough then, and begin where she left off. Thus, with a singular disregard for their patient's happiness and usefulness, they ruthlessly condemn her to a life of narrow interests and petty thoughts, a necessity, perhaps, in some cases, but certainly to be advised only as a last resort.

M. Carey Thomas writes from the dean's office of Bryn Mawr:

“I think that, for the present, or until men have learned that for women as well as for themselves intellectual activity is the keenest of possible lifelong pleasures and a safeguard against a multitude of evils, the skilled and sympathetic woman physician, rather than the man, should accompany young girls through their school and college life. She will be less ready to secure physical health for her patients at the expense of intellectual development, and less hopeful of so securing it.”

The outcome—partly, it may be, of these barbaric notions about women, partly of the luxury of the time and its resulting lack of moral fibre—is what may be considered the most radical reason for the private-school girl's failure to meet educational demands; the too prevalent idea that a girl must be kept from everything hard. For her there must be no wrestling with difficulty until she force from it its daybreak blessing, “Henceforth thou shalt be known as one that hath prevailed.” No; she is only a girl, to be shielded, and petted, and amused, and made comfortable. If she has a hard lesson, she must not bother over it; if she has a little pain, she must go to bed with it, unless, indeed, she wishes to go to a party; if she does not feel like eating bread and beefsteak, she must be given pickles and fruitcake; if she seems restless, the world must be ransacked to find some new pleasure for her; if she suffers a little disappointment, she must unburden her woe to everybody, and cry her eyes out over it. Where

is her chance to learn physical and mental control? Where is her chance for physical and mental health? Where is her chance for happiness? It may be one of the mysterious laws of being, but it is a law, nevertheless, that strength of character, like strength of muscle, is developed only by resistance. The strong souls—and they are the only really happy ones—win their power by what they overcome. Now, all this strength, with its resulting blessedness, a girl must gain in spite of those that love her best, rather than by their aid. Obedience, reverence for law, self-poise, endurance, these that are the natural, easy lessons of childhood, she must learn, if she learn them at all, through womanhood's bitter mistakes and their inevitable penalties. Is it strange that when the poor child goes to boarding school with its thorough work, its wholesome diet, its quiet, regular life, its subordination of the individual wish to the general good, its "You ought and so you must"—is it strange that the result should be what we have seen? A teacher that was asked for statistics regarding the health of the pupils in her school puts the matter very tersely:

"The girls of the wealthy class are far from being able to do good work, on account of their physical condition; but my experience is that children are born with fairly good constitutions. It is the lack of common-sense and the over-indulgence of the American mother, which cause the girl to grow up believing that she is nervous or weak, and must continue to be indulged, and must be tired after the least exertion, and must be nervous over examinations, and all the rest, that make it so hard for us. If the mothers were strong, even mentally, they would put into their children courage and will, which go so far even against poor health. Girls seem to me to have too many imaginary ills, or rather they succumb to the smallest ache; a slight headache is enough to make them give up every duty of the day. Now, while I am not unsympathetic in distress, the greater part of the ills could be overcome if the girls were taught and encouraged at home to be stronger. . . . I think that more than 90 per cent. of the girls that come to us could do a reasonable amount of work if they had the ambition, but as they do not wish to go to school to study, their parents have them excused from one thing or another on the plea of nervousness. Many even wish to be excused from gymnastics. I think there is more laziness than ill health in the world. . . . If we could only reform the mothers we might hope for a better state of things; as it is, we must struggle for the mothers of the future, and if we can make them wiser in their generation we shall not have lived in vain."

Yes; the trouble is with the mothers and physicians, not with the girls. Very rarely, if a girl be given a fair chance, does she fail to respond to a school's honest efforts for her good. After the first restiveness is past, if she be not upset by selfish letters from home and by that necessary bane of school work, vacation, with its physical and spiritual demoralization, she enjoys being governed, and she wakes to

the fact that she is a rational and responsible being with an almost pathetic delight in her new dignity. The girls are all right; the material is excellent. The questions are: Will the mothers and fathers give the schools a chance to use it? and will the schools prove themselves equal to their opportunity? The physicians will, of course, in time, by advancing medical science and by experience be released from their thralldom to barbarism. In any case, there are, and always will be, enough wise ones—men and women, too—to offer a choice.

“Two hundred souls lost, and a few women and children!” The American mother, however weak and ignorant, protests against this satire of Dean Swift’s. Let her, and through her let the father, by their treatment of their daughter, no longer give it tacit assent. Let them never forget that she is a “soul born to immortality,” not sent into the world solely or even mainly to be a “comfort” to them. She has her own life to live, her own destiny to fulfil, for which she must be fitted or unfitted in accordance with inexorable laws. Of this they defraud her at their peril.

The rearing of infants is becoming a fine art. Infants’ foods, infants’ diet, even infants’ “training and discipline,” are demanding the skilled intelligence of physician, mother, and nurse. These are hopeful signs. The mother is learning the connection between sterilized milk and a vigorous baby; between correct habits of eating and sleeping, and good digestion and quiet nerves. Let her learn that the laws of physical being do not suspend action at the end of babyhood. Let her learn, also, that law governs brains as well as stomachs, character as well as nerves. “My leave,” said the Frenchwoman, “was not asked before I came into the world.” The mother and father can answer this awful suggestion only by freely granting to their daughter her right to her own life in its fullest development. Will they sell this birthright for a mess of pottage? and will teachers ratify the sale? Surely the mother’s heart is large enough and the teacher’s brain is strong enough to forbid the infamous transaction. But the danger still threatens so long as the standards of home and of school remain what they are.

And just here is the tremendous responsibility of the private school. For the sake of popularity and a living, it has too often repeated and emphasized the mistakes and failures of the home. The common notion of a private school proves this—the notion that is summed up in no rules, little order and discipline, no systematic study, no standards of scholarship and attainment; in one word, few

duties and many "privileges." Yet the principals of these schools are women of liberal education and broad culture, capable of forming and working out high ideals. Their duty is plain. It is to supply what the home training often lacks. They must insist upon obedience, punctuality, wholesome and regular diet, vigorous exercise, proper and modest clothing, good reading, hard thinking, and womanly self-control. If they do, they will be called "strict," and they will probably meet with adverse criticism and pecuniary loss. Very well. Teaching is of too vital importance to be a matter of dollars and cents, and if a private-school principal cannot earn her living by a good school, let her seek some other work. Let her not dare to prostitute her high office and ministry to her own self-support. "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits," is a demand that has met with too ready a compliance. It is time that private schools joined forces to "boycott" superficial work and lax discipline, in order that parents may be compelled, if they send their daughters to school at all, to send them where they shall be obliged to learn physical and mental control. Invalidism among school girls would then rapidly disappear.

Are there not enough good mothers to uphold the schools in this work? Over against the mother who wept because she found that her daughter's handkerchiefs, when they were sent home from boarding school to be washed, were not stiff with homesick tears, private school teachers can place many a mother whose wise, unselfish love stops at no sacrifice of comfort or happiness to secure the best development of her child. Joy and life, as well as despair and death, are in that terrible saying of Anne of Austria to Cardinal Richelieu: "My Lord Cardinal, God does not pay at the end of every week, but at the end he pays."

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THE FARMER'S ISOLATION AND THE REMEDY.

THAT there is a general and profound discontent existing among the farmers of our country, no one familiar with the condition of the agricultural classes can doubt. Were specific evidence wanting, the tendency of the farming population, especially the younger people, to drift into cities, the disproportionate growth of the rural in comparison with the urban population, as disclosed by the census, and sundry like evidences familiar to all, would dispel any skepticism touching the discontent of this great industrial class. What seems in the nature of a paradox is that this discontent is greatest in the broad and most fertile regions of our country, where the population, relative to the cultivated area, is less than in the more sterile portions where the population is denser.

That a deep and serious disquietude should exist among any class that is an integral part of the industrial body of a people, is to be deplored, but when it pervades a body that is the most important numerical and commercial factor of this or of any other people, it becomes a matter of deep national concern and even of alarm; and to search for the cause or the causes of it becomes a public duty. For behind this, as behind all other phenomena, it is to be presumed an efficient cause exists. It seems to me that the disquietude of the farmers cannot be sufficiently disposed of, as some believe it can, by pointing to the very evident fact that the farming class of to-day, as compared with that of some decades in the past, has advanced to a higher plane of life; for to any one familiar with the internal condition of all classes of our people, agricultural and non-agricultural, it is evident that of the marvellous advance in comforts, conveniences, and luxuries that through the agencies of the sciences and arts has come during the past generation the world over, the farmers have shared in the benefits to a less degree than any other class. Indeed, of the sum of human advantages which is the product and property of the age, he has relatively less as his share than he formerly had; and the discontent becomes the greater because it is evident that the very agencies that have brought about this marvellous and rapid advance in the general well-