

# The Home

## An Important Decision

The question of woman suffrage is one that is forcing itself upon the attention of women all over the country. Even conservative women have become friendly to the cause, if not advocates of it. No intelligent woman can afford to treat the subject of woman suffrage with indifference. She must face the question whether she will or no. All intelligent women agree that women should be represented on every Board of Education; the most conservative women agree that in small towns and villages it would be very much better for the cause of education were women represented on the Board. Women agree universally that the subject of street-cleaning is of enough importance for them to organize Health Protective Associations in order to secure clean streets. The more intelligent, earnest, and energetic the members are, the more certain is the life of the officials of the health department to be made miserable when they neglect their duty in the smallest degree. On the question of license, women are almost a unit in the belief that their ballots would prove a positive influence against the liquor traffic if they had a vote on the license question.

There is another side to it. The ballot granted to the intelligent woman counts for no more than the ballot granted to the unintelligent woman. Will the positive result of woman suffrage be for good? or will it be merely increasing the ignorant vote of the country to give the ballot to women? Should not women be prepared by years of study and investigation before the ballot is given to them? or will the giving of the ballot impel them to a larger intelligence on political questions—especially municipal questions, which affect the homes so closely?

One fact must never be lost sight of—that woman suffrage does not mean increase only in intelligent, conscientious, earnest voters, but it also means the increase of the unintelligent, the vicious, the ignorant voters. The problem is a serious one, and no amount of enthusiasm or admiration for one's sex should blind one to the possible evils that might follow the granting of the ballot to women, as well as the positive good that would result.



## Overstrain in the Life of the School-Girl

By Gertrude Hope

For various reasons, the months of February and March constitute a season of storm and stress. Mothers, physicians, brain-workers, and business men dread their annual catastrophes, and with cause. These months also mark the crisis of the school year; and it is seriously to be doubted whether as many tears are shed over their sicknesses, bereavements, and business troubles as are called forth by their school vicissitudes. In the well-to-do and ambitious households of America, the anxieties centering about children—especially girls—of school age are profound and tragic. Most constant is the lament over "pressure" in the school-girl's programme. It often seems to pervade the social atmosphere. At teas and dinners it comes from the parents who demand the constant companionship of their young daughters. In the church and Sunday-school it is loudly emphasized by the toilers for religion and philanthropy.

Nine years ago the Association of Collegiate Alumnae published a modest pamphlet which went far to refute the then prevalent cry of "sex in education." Instances

gathered by college women and tabulated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that under normal conditions the higher mental training had brought its recipients, not debility and tension, but vigor and force.

Those statistics are not voluminous or complete; their circulation has naturally been somewhat limited. But their subtle influence on public opinion has been deepened by the opinions and practices of the girl graduates themselves. In all centers of intelligence it is now fashionable for college women to be healthy, cheerful, and helpful, rather than sickly, morbid, and dependent. Young women at Vassar College, Bryn Mawr, Michigan, and the Harvard Annex do far more difficult work than their older sisters attempted twenty years ago. Yet "victims" of the college training are now hard to find. If a girl breaks down under it, the reason is usually sought in the right quarter: in poor preparation, in vacation cramming or dissipation, in bad nutrition, family anxieties, or other elements whose strain was felt outside the precincts of Alma Mater. Yet the question is still seriously asked, "Is the American woman deteriorating?" Many young girls fall by the wayside in the days of grammar and high-school, of academy or boarding-school, life. It seems wise to analyze those health questions which concern them. If they are indeed hurried, worried, overtasked, and overstrained young creatures, whose is the fault? Are their teachers overtraining them? Are their parents co-operating loyally with the schools? Is there a lack of proportion in American life? Is the girl more burdened than her brother? Is public opinion in any wise responsible for evils which popular clamor exaggerates?

The degree to which carefully registered facts may dispel cherished theory was illustrated during the Columbian Congress of Household Economics. A wise woman, having promised an essay on the affirmative side of an important question, presented its contradictory when her turn came. She explained that investigation had quite disproved her major premise! Something like this paradox confronted a company of college graduates some years since. In a number of typical schools, public and private, rural and urban, they circulated the following questions:

### PHYSICAL CONDITION

Are you (1) subject to sleeplessness, or sleep disturbed by dreams? (2) to weak eyes? (3) to headache? (4) to indigestion? (5) excitable or low-spirited? (6) liable to worry over studies? Have you (7) inherited tendencies or disease? (8) incidental acute disease?

### DIVISION OF TIME

What are your (1) hours of daily recitation? (2) of study? (3) hours and kinds of exercise out-of-doors? (4) in gymnasium? (5) hours and kinds of housework? (6) of piano-practice? (7) of painting, languages, etc., outside of school-work? (8) hour of retiring? (9) of rising? (10) hours for meals? (11) hours given to charitable or fancy work, and to novel-reading? (12) kind and amount of social intercourse? (13) kind and amount of recreation? (14) time spent in doing nothing?

The answers elicited were compared with the former sets of "Health Statistics," and several interesting conclusions followed. In very few cases was study found accountable for injury to health or nerves. Insufficient sleep, unsuitable food and clothing, lack of healthful exercise, social excitement, excessive piano-practice, the effort to do many things at once—all these had wrought untold mischief where genuine study had been crowded out.

Nervous pressure was found at its height in the most superficial schools—wherever *fashion* ruled methods of instruction and routine of life. Given an intelligent love of learning, wisely directed, and a rational home life, together with respect for the fundamental laws of health, girls suffered from study no more than boys. Health and nerves were "toned up" by the cheerful regularity of school life. Nervous wrecks had shattered upon some reef of bad inheritance or parental folly, not in the deep currents of sound learning.

It is but just to reckon the proportion of time, in actual days, weeks, and hours, given to school tasks. In the public schools, whose daily sessions are longest, but little more than half the days of the year remain for work, when

Sundays, holidays, and vacations are deducted. In private schools, whose day is shorter, less than half the year is given to study. By reason of duration alone, therefore, home influences must preponderate in the school-girl's plans.

Here is the testimony given by a college graduate concerning the circumstances of pupils in a fashionable "boarding and day school":

"Half-past nine o'clock P.M. is the earliest hour at which any girl retires; 2 A.M., the latest reported. Several are up until one, two nights a week. Twenty-six hours in social intercourse (in dinners, calls, receptions) is the most reported by any one girl in one week. One girl spends six hours a week at the dressmaker's. A day scholar was late at geometry one morning, so as to go down-town 'to buy the sweetest little pug you ever saw.' She 'couldn't wait until Saturday, for every girl in her set had one.' Another wonders whether she will lose her 'marks' in chemistry if she does not perform her experiments. 'You see, if I stay to do them, I can't leave until three o'clock; and I sha'n't have time to go to drive.' Even children in the primary departments are excused early for matinées and children's parties. Amateur theatricals, for charitable purposes, demand rehearsals every evening for two or three weeks—every evening taking two or three hours. Several of our pupils have been engaged in them. The absence of any serious purpose, the habit of regarding 'society' as the end and aim, are sufficient to scatter serious considerations to the winds whenever they clash with social attractions. Nor is the actual time spent in frivolous diversions the end of the trouble; for many of them are in the highest degree taxing, exciting, exhausting, demanding as the price of indulgence lassitude of mind and body."

To complete this study of variations, one should record the weekly averages of the public-school girl and the pupil in a graded academy of real standing. But to those who have candidly studied these problems as conscientious teachers, as parents valuing education for its true ends and not as a social stepping-stone, all the popular notions about education seem to need revision. In our artificial, unsettled conditions of life the "crowding" which is so thoughtlessly deplored is in direct proportion to the individual's compliance with untrained public opinion. If the pupil's reason and powers of observation are trained in a good school, health becomes sacred to her; she meets occasions of fatigue with discretion and not with recklessness. In almost all public schools—and in fashionable schools according to their degree of fashion—girls are superficially taught, as well as confused by a multitude of jarring interests. Their force is wasted and their mental purposes are either perverted or blighted. Now, fashionable school and public school, different as they are, are alike the creations of their victims. Both are subject to transmitted prejudice, individual selfishness, and shortsighted whim. Local politics plays the part in the one which money-making motives usurp in the other. On one side long hours and over-drill, on the other pervasive worldliness and false standards, work the evils against which intelligent critics justly protest. In both, imperfect hygiene and wrong ideals waste mental and nervous force. The public schools will not be reformed until they pass from political domination into the direction of scientific educators. The fashionable finishing-schools will flourish so long as people who ask for bread are content with the costly stones which are proffered them in lieu thereof.

It means much that most public-school officers send their own children to those private schools where "cramming" and rank tests are discountenanced, the grading of pupils made genuine, and small classes reconciled with ample recitation hours. Here, too, the mistake of the individual parent is prevented from harming his own child or her companions. The heads of such schools must constantly protect their charges against family vanities and family burdens. They must jealously guard their hours of sleep, must even care for their diet. Not only must they ward off social tyranny; they must keep at bay that mechanism of church and charity which would make mer-

chandise of bright young faces and too generous enthusiasms. To them we owe largely the growing protests against universal musical training, irrespective of talent or preference. Such righteous warfare as this can be waged successfully only when a school's financial basis or its hold on general respect secures its independence. If its directors are obliged to make money or to influence voters, its methods must obviously reflect the prejudices of its clientele. Those American school-girls who are overstrained cannot be relieved until Americans learn that the teacher must receive the deference given to other professional experts. The aristocracy of intellect must be a vital element in every genuine democracy of men.



## An Important Measure

A very important bill for the creation of a National Bureau of Public Health is before Congress. The power given this Board, composed, of course, of men who meet with the entire approval of the medical societies of the country, should be almost autocratic. When an epidemic breaks out in a town, it should be their decision that would decide the sanitary measures to be employed to stamp out and prevent a return of the disease in all cases where the local board shows itself unfit or incapable of grappling with the local problems. The water-supply in all towns and cities is a matter that should receive a large share of the attention of this National Board, as so many of our epidemics are due to contaminated water-supplies. There comes to mind now a small hamlet in a mountain region that is threaded with beautiful mountain streams and trout-brooks. A tannery, with its workmen's houses, has been built on one of these streams, which is the water-supply of three other hamlets and a large town that is very popular as a summer resort for city people. The refuse of all kinds from these workmen's cottages is emptied directly into this stream, which is seven miles from the town. This stream is the dumping-ground and the sewer for the refuse of thirty families. There is no local Board of Health, and it is only a question of time when the people who visit this beautiful mountain resort will return home victims of typhoid fever, their deaths lowering the health-rate of their own cities, while the local papers will protest against people moving into houses that have been closed all summer, when the truth of the matter is that the disease is due to the contaminated water-supply of the place in which they have spent their summer. Not far from that region is one where there are not less than two hundred summer hotels within a radius of fifty miles, and it is safe to say that not more than three of these houses are properly equipped from a sanitary point of view. It would be infinitely better for people to remain at home, where they have large rooms, bath-rooms, and healthful water-supplies, than to crowd themselves into small rooms with few or no bathing facilities, with sanitary arrangements that are a disgrace to the civilization of our age, and to eat canned goods during the entire season, under the mistaken idea that they have made the change for the family's health. State Boards of Health seem to be a name merely. Rarely do we hear of them grappling successfully with any of the questions that arouse the interest or indignation of people living in small towns. The National Board of Health would, it is hoped, be entirely free from political control, and would become in a measure an agency for the enlargement of the knowledge not only of the medical profession, but of the people of the whole country.



I go at what I am about as if there were nothing else in the world for the time being. That's the secret of all hard-working men; but most of them can't carry it into their amusements. Luckily for me, I can stop from all work at short notice, and turn head over heels in the sight of all creation, and say, "I won't be good, or bad, or wise, or anything, till two o'clock to-morrow."—Charles Kingsley.