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Conclusion

Martha Maclear

true

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CONCLUSION

EDUCATION IS NOT a seedling which inevitably grows of itself but like other seedlings it must be tended with care and watered and shaped by ideas. These ideas must be of various shades and of differing varieties owing to the multiplicity of the social forces and inventions which press upon them. Especially is this true of the education of girls since it was peculiarly amenable to the pressure of public opinion and changed in conformity with that opinion.

As America grew from a weak and apologetic democracy, one with limited suffrage afraid of its own powers, into a strong and self-conscious government, willing to entrust its privileges to the many rather than the few, women gained in importance. With this gain there came an increased appreciation of the need of education for such a large group in the nation. Little by little the realization became clear that a new life in a new country demanded a new education differing in many respects from the traditions brought over from England.

Religious thought, also, had a place in advancing girl's education. It was one of the profound convictions of the churches that girls needed an education equivalent to that provided for boys in order that they, too, might be good Christians. Therefore the various denominations opened schools for girls or allowed them to enter institutions already provided for boys.

Another force which wrought great social changes in America as elsewhere was the Industrial Revolution. From 1800 on through the century, the United States was changing from a rural nation engaged in agriculture to an urban nation engaged in trade and commerce. Such a change must, of necessity, have had a profound effect upon education for girls. Among many innovations, it made possible the day school both public and private which girls might attend while living at home. Both as an economic proposition and as a social innovation this change had much to commend it.

In evaluating the forces which have developed any movement, it is difficult to assign a just measure of influence to each. Undoubtedly intellectual and social movements played a large part in the changes under consideration, as did the work of individuals and political action by states. To which should greatest credit be given? It is an open question but one not so difficult to answer in the case of the education of girls as in that of

education in general. To the writer it seems plain that the determining factor in this evolution was the work of individuals, chiefly women. Although many eminent men, educators as well as men in other walks of life, helped the good cause, yet in the last analysis, it was the work of women themselves which wrought the miracle. Beginning in 1819 with the bold challenge of Emma Willard through the New York legislature to the nation as a whole, women of all shades of opinion labored in season and out for wider educational opportunities for their sex. Had they not voiced the hopes and aspirations which lay dormant in many women's hearts, had girls themselves not showed a desire and an ability to seize every opportunity offered them, the reform could hardly have been accomplished. Of necessity the practical and overt demonstration of this reform had to come through the efforts and money of men since they alone had both political and economic independence. However, it is highly improbable that such a radical change in educational procedure would have been thrust upon a group unwilling to accept it.

It is well that no end can be seen from a beginning for, were it otherwise, no agitation could long survive, since the end is usually a compromise. The truth of this proposition can be seen in the culmination of the struggle for the establishment of an adequate education for girls. No group gained an unqualified success. The conservatives shrunk to an almost impotent minority gradually losing prestige. The liberals have been out-distanced, since the trend of the times is far beyond that set by them for their goal. Not only has education for mothers and the home been established but other well-established aims lead far away from the home into the publicity of the great world in a manner which would never have been sanctioned by this group. On the other hand the radicals have fallen far short of their programme. Some colleges and professional schools have opened their doors to women but this is not universally true. The very schools and colleges at which the radicals aimed have proved most obdurate. Nor has Vassar opened its doors to men nor has any man applied for admission to this stronghold of "the sex." Much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. In the compromise worked out between the two active groups in this reform lies the certainty of the permanence of the results thus far obtained and the guarantee of better results to follow. It was a work well worth doing and all praise and gratitude are due those who made the fight.