

**SHOULD WOMEN STUDY THE
CLASSICS?: OPENING LECTURE
AT THE ARTS COURSE AT
QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE,
GLASGOW**

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Should Women Study the Classics?: Opening Lecture at the Arts Course at Queen Margaret College, glasgow by George G. Ramsay

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GEORGE G. RAMSAY

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*OPENING LECTURE OF THE ARTS COURSE AT
QUEEN MARGARET COLLEGE, GLASGOW,*

NOVEMBER 3rd, 1891.

BY

GEORGE G. RAMSAY, M.A. OXON., LL.D.,

PROFESSOR OF HUMANITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

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SHOULD WOMEN STUDY THE CLASSICS ?

WHEN I was invited by your Council, not many days ago, to deliver the opening lecture for the Arts Course at Queen Margaret's, my first reply was that owing to various engagements it was impossible for me, in the time, to write anything worthy of the occasion. But, on second thoughts, I preferred to show my sympathy with the objects of this College in however imperfect a manner, by complying at once with the invitation of your Council, rather than wait for some future opportunity of putting before you in a more finished form my views of the objects which you should aim at in the studies of this place, and of the connection which those studies should have with the work of your future lives. I set a high value upon the work which this College has already done, and have high hopes as to that which it has yet to do. I have the deepest sympathy with the movement for raising the education of women to which this College, and similar Colleges elsewhere, owe their origin. That movement is one of the noblest movements, most

rich in promise of future blessing, of all the movements of our time; and it is impossible that one whose life has been spent in the work of educating men, should not rejoice to find it in his power to give it a helping hand.

Your Secretary, indeed, in kindness, suggested that I might bring out some veteran lecture out of a musty drawer to do service on this occasion; but you will, I am sure, forgive me if I prefer to address to you a few fresh words, however imperfect they may be, on a subject which, in my opinion, much needs rational and practical discussion at the present moment. What is the proper place of the Classics in the education of women?

Some place in female education the Classics already *have* acquired; for, at this moment, the tendency of female education is all in the direction of assimilation to male education. Every school, every college, which aims at the higher education of women, puts Classics and Mathematics in the forefront; almost all are making efforts towards the teaching of Science; History, Literature and Modern Languages, never yet very successfully taught to boys, are being taught on similar methods to girls. The educational feature of the age has been a throwing down of the intellectual barriers between man and woman, a throwing open to women of intellectual aims and ambitions heretofore confined to men; and what seems curious at first sight is this, that the Classics have been finding their way into the female curriculum at

the very moment when they seemed likely to be slipping out, in whole or part, of the male curriculum.

But, in reality, these two movements are converging, rather than opposed, movements. They have their origin in the same cause. It has been discovered, rather late in the day, that there are no such intellectual distinctions as used to be taken for granted between men and women; and that, in consequence, there is no intellectual pursuit which need remain, on the mere score of difficulty, a sealed book to woman, if she have a mind for it, and if it be suited to her future requirements. Once more has the old proverb been found true: What is sauce for the gander, is sauce for the goose also.

Hence, just as it has been recognized that there are certain male minds unsuited for the severer studies, certain male callings for which those studies are not indispensable; so it has been made apparent, by some conspicuous examples, that there are certain female minds which can draw their whole value out of the severest studies, certain female lives to which these may prove the richest and most graceful ornament. The process, on both sides, is one of assimilation; differences of mind, whether in men or women, will, under all circumstances, call for different modes of treatment; so our question is no longer whether Classics, Mathematics, Science, should be taught to women, but to what women, with a view to what lives, for what exact purposes, and to what extent respectively, should they be taught?

At the outset of this inquiry we meet with one

consoling fact: we may pursue it without the terror of the so-called Practical Man for ever before our eyes. Almost everywhere nowadays—most of all in a commercial city like this—it is impossible even to discuss the question of culture and education without being told authoritatively by that personage ‘Now, mind, I respect your theories; I’ve a great respect for Latin and Greek, and for all your ‘ologies, and I want my son to get all the good he can out of College while he is there. But he has to make his way in the world; he must take, if he can, some money out of it; you must not unfit him for becoming a business man; and he must be done with the University before he is twenty. Teach him what you like, only teach him something that will pay.’

The simple culture of the mind for its own sake—the mere perfecting of the man—is, alas! but seldom considered among the ‘things that pay’; so in the rush forward to grasp the means of living—often, no doubt, a matter of sheer necessity—the acquisition of that which makes life worth living is too often pushed aside altogether. Not so as yet, happily, with girls. The claims of women, doubtless, to enter some of the professions, notably two of the most intellectual of the professions—those of Teaching and of Medicine—have been amongst the causes which have pressed on the higher education of women; but the movement has had a far broader base than this; and even in regard to these two callings, women have rather pressed for admission into them because they

were qualified, than scrambled through a qualification because they were anxious to enter them.

Not long ago our learned Principal, half in irony, half in earnest, devoted part of his Closing Address to the task of demonstrating to a too-believing world that, if it wanted to get on in life, the University was about the last place to come to for the purpose; he seemed almost to imply—if he did, I do not share his opinion—that the University rather unfitted a man for mere success. Such doctrine, I am sure, he would not have addressed to a University of women, or to a College of women aspiring to be admitted to University degrees. Here, at least, indifferent to mere considerations of L. S. D., we may ask the questions which are alone worth the asking:—What is Culture? What are its constituent elements? Through what studies, by what discipline, in any particular case, are those elements most likely to be secured, and made abiding elements, perennial sources of light and happiness and influence, in the life and character of the future woman?

For that must be our aim, ever kept in view—*the life and character of the future woman*. The culture we aim at is not to be cast off with short dresses and long hair; and it is to be used for ends suitable for *women*, not necessarily suitable for men. We have no sympathy with the 'Wild Woman' assailed with a frenzy of bad language—bad enough for any man to use—by Mrs. Lynn Linton in the *Nineteenth Century* for October; nor because we be-