

**DIARY OF ANNA GREEN
WINSLOW, A BOSTON
SCHOOL GIRL OF 1771**

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Diary of Anna Green Winslow, a Boston School Girl of 1771 by Alice Morse Earle

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A BOSTON SCHOOL GIRL OF 1771

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FOREWORD.

*I*N the year 1770, a bright little girl ten years of age, Anna Green Winslow, was sent from her far away home in Nova Scotia to Boston, the birthplace of her parents, to be "finished" at Boston schools by Boston teachers. She wrote, with evident eagerness and loving care, for the edification of her parents and her own practice in penmanship, this interesting and quaint diary, which forms a most sprightly record, not only of the life of a young girl at that time, but of the prim and narrow round of daily occurrences in provincial Boston. It thus assumes a positive value as an historical picture of the domestic life of that day; a value of which the little girl who wrote it, or her kinsfolk who affectionately preserved it to our own day, never could have dreamed. To many New England families it is specially interesting as a complete rendering, a perfect presentment, of the childish life of their great grandmothers, her companions.

It is an even chance which ruling thought
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in the clever little writer, a love of religion or a love of dress, shows most plainly its influence on this diary. On the whole, I think that youthful vanity, albeit of a very natural and innocent sort, is more pervasive of the pages. And it is fortunate that this is the case; for, from the frankly frivolous though far from self-conscious entries we gain a very exact notion, a very valuable picture, of the dress of a young girl at that day. We know all the details of her toilet, from the "pompe-dore" shoes and the shifts (which she had never worn till she lived in Boston), to the absurd and top-heavy head-decoration of "black feathers, my past comb & all my past garnet marquasett and jet pins, together with my silver plume." If this fantastic assemblage of ornament were set upon the "Hed-dus roll," so graphically described, it is easy to understand the denunciations of the time upon women's headgear. In no contemporary record or account, no matter who the writer, can be found such a vivacious and witty description of the modish hairdressing of that day as in the pages of this diary.

But there are many entries in the journal of this vain little Puritan devotee to show an almost equal attention to religion; records of sermons which she had heard, and of religious

gious conversations in which she had taken a self-possessed part; and her frequent use of Biblical expressions and comparisons shows that she also remembered fully what she read. Her ambitious theological sermon-notes were evidently somewhat curtailed by the sensible advice of the aunt with whom she resided, who thereby checked also the consequent injudicious praise of her pastor, the Old South minister. For Anna and her kinsfolk were of the congregation of the Old South church; and this diary is in effect a record of the life of Old South church attendants. Many were what Anna terms "sisters of the Old South," and nine tenths of the names of her companions and friends may be found on the baptismal and membership records of that church.

Anna was an industrious little wight, active in all housewifely labors and domestic accomplishments, and attentive to her lessons. She could make "pyes," and fine network; she could knit lace, and spin linen thread and woolen yarn; she could make purses, and embroider pocket-books, and weave watch strings, and piece patchwork. She learned "dancing, or danceing I should say," from one Master Turner; she attended a sewing school, to become a neat and deft little sempstress, and above all, she attended a writing school to learn

learn that most indispensable and most appreciated of eighteenth century accomplishments — fine writing. Her handwriting, of which a fac-simile is here shown, was far better than that of most girls of twelve to-day; with truth and justice could Anna say, "Aunt says I can write pretily." Her orthography was quite equal to that of grown persons of her time, and her English as good as that of Mercy Warren, her older contemporary writer.

And let me speak also of the condition of her diary. It covers seventy-two pages of paper about eight inches long by six and a half inches wide. The writing is uniform in size, every letter is perfectly formed; it is as legible as print, and in the entire diary but three blots can be seen, and these are very small. A few pages were ruled by the writer, the others are unruled. The old paper, though heavy and good, is yellow with age, and the water marks C. F. R. and the crown stand out distinctly. The sheets are sewed in a little book, on which a marbled paper cover has been placed, probably by a later hand than Anna's. Altogether it is a remarkably creditable production for a girl of twelve.

It is well also to compare her constant diligence and industry displayed to us through her records of a day's work — and at another time,

time, of a week's work—with that of any girl of her age in a corresponding station of life nowadays. We learn that physical pain or disability were no excuse for slothfulness; Anna was not always well—had heavy colds, and was feverish; but well or ill was always employed. Even with painful local afflictions such as a "whilloe," she still was industrious, "improving it to perfect myself in learning to spin flax." She read much—the Bible constantly—and also found amusement in reading "a variety of composures."

She was a friendly little soul, eager to be loved; resenting deeply that her Aunt Storer let "either one of her chaises, her chariot or babyhutt," pass the door every day, without sending for her; going cheerfully tea-drinking from house to house of her friends; delighting even in the catechising and the sober Thursday Lecture. She had few amusements and holidays compared with the manifold pleasures that children have nowadays, though she had one holiday which the Revolution struck from our calendar—the King's Coronation Day. She saw the Artillery Company drill, and she visited brides and babies and old folks, and attended some funerals. When she was twelve years old she "came out"—became a "miss in her teens"—and went to a succession