

**WOMEN IN THE  
UNIVERSITIES OF  
ENGLAND AND  
SCOTLAND**

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Women in the Universities of England and Scotland by Emily Davies

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EMILY DAVIES.

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## WOMEN IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND.

IN the recent controversy on the proposed admission of women to Oxford and Cambridge Degrees, a notable feature has been the apparent absence of knowledge in regard to a movement which, having been in progress for some fifty years, has now reached a somewhat advanced stage. The present proposals have been treated as portending a sudden revolution; speculation as to what might happen in certain contingencies has taken the place of calm consideration of existing facts; much anxiety has been expressed as to the dangers of mixed universities, of co-education, of a hasty assimilation of the education of women to that of men; and it has been urged that, in so serious a matter, it is most necessary to guard against precipitate action, which might imperil interests of the gravest importance. Of the many successive tentative steps, quietly and cautiously taken, which have led up to the present position, but little appears to be known, and thus the guidance which might be obtained from the lessons of experience has not been sought. Under these circumstances I have thought that it might be helpful and of some interest to present in chronological order such stages as can be definitely marked

in the progress of the movement, and to note points which may have special bearing on questions now under discussion. I propose to confine my statement to England and Scotland, leaving on one side any reference to important action taken elsewhere, partly for the sake of brevity, and partly on account of the large amount of time and labour required for searching out and verifying details spread over a long period and a wide field.

So far as the beginning of such a movement as we have in view can be assigned to any particular action, it may be traced to the first efforts for the establishment of women's colleges in London. In 1848 the Governesses' Benevolent Institution made arrangements with "Professors of high talent and standing in society to open classes in all branches of female education," and having received permission to give to this branch of their work the name of Queen's College, started the institution at 67, Harley Street. In 1849 a similar institution was opened at 47, Bedford Square.

At that date even the name of 'college,' as associated with women, seemed to require apology. In an inaugural lecture given by Professor F. D. Maurice on March 29th, 1848, he says:

"It is proposed, immediately after Easter, to open a college in London for the education of females. The word 'college' in this connexion has to English ears a novel and an ambitious sound. I wish we could have found a simpler one which would have described our object as well. Since we

have chosen this, we should take pains to explain the sense in which we use it; to show, if we can show truly, that we are not devising a scheme to realise some favourite theory, but are seeking, by humble and practical methods, to supply an acknowledged deficiency."

Even at that time such masculine studies as Latin and mathematics were held to be fit subjects for female education, and were included in the programme of the new college. Of one of these subjects Professor Maurice says:

"We have set down mathematics in our course of studies, knowing that we might thereby encounter the charge of giving a little learning, which is dangerous, but being ready to meet that charge in this case as in others. We are aware that our pupils are not likely to advance far in mathematics, but we believe that if they learn really what they do learn they will not have got what is dangerous, but what is safe. . . . The least bit of knowledge that is knowledge must be good, and I cannot conceive that a young lady can feel her mind in a more dangerous state than it was because she has gained one truer glimpse into the conditions under which the world in which it has pleased God to place her actually exists."

Some years later, Greek was added to the curriculum. At Bedford College, Latin, Mathematics, and Natural Science have been taught continuously since 1849, and Greek from 1875 to the present time.

These colleges, however, were only in a general sense pioneers in the movement for opening universities to women. They were self-contained, and there is no evidence that they aimed at being attached to any university. The first attempt to obtain the admission of a woman to membership of



a university seems to have been made by Miss Jessie Meriton White, who in May 1856 addressed a letter to the Registrar of the University of London, inquiring whether a woman could "become a candidate for a diploma in medicine, if on presenting herself for examination she shall produce all the requisite certificates of character, capacity, and study from one of the institutions recognised by the London University." The opinion of Counsel having been taken, it was on July 9th, 1856, resolved by the Senate, "That Miss J. M. White be informed that the Senate, acting upon the opinion of its legal adviser, does not consider itself empowered to admit females as candidates for degrees."

The question was again brought before the Senate by an application in 1862 from Miss Elizabeth Garrett, requesting to be admitted as a candidate at the next Matriculation examination, whereupon it was resolved, "That the Senate, as at present advised, sees no reason to doubt the validity of the opinion given by Mr. Tomlinson, July 9th, 1856, as to the admissibility of females to the examinations of the University." On the receipt of this reply, Mr. Newson Garrett, having been informed that the University was about to apply for a new Charter, presented a memorial to the Senate, supported by persons of weight and influence, in which it was suggested that "the technical legal objection, which appears to be the only obstacle to the admission of women, may be removed by the insertion of a

clause expressly providing for the extension to women of the privileges of the University." On May 7th it was moved by the Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Grote, and seconded by the Right Hon. R. Lowe, M.P., "That the Senate will endeavour, as far as their powers reach, to obtain a modification of the Charter, rendering female students admissible to the degrees and honours of the University of London on the same conditions of examination as male students, but not rendering them admissible to become members of Convocation." The motion was lost by the casting vote of the Chancellor. The decision was communicated to Mr. Garrett in the following letter from the Registrar :

"SIR,

"I am directed to inform you that after a full consideration of your memorial, the Senate have come to the conclusion that it is not expedient to propose any alteration in the Charter with a view of obtaining power to admit females to the examinations of the University.

"I think it well to add that this decision has not been the result of any indisposition to give encouragement to the higher education of the female sex, a very general concurrence having been expressed in the desire stated in your memorial that an opportunity should be afforded to women of testing their attainments in the more solid branches of learning. But it has been based on the conviction entertained by the majority of the Senate, that it is not desirable that the constitution of this University should be modified for the sake of affording such opportunity. . . .

"WILLIAM B. CARPENTER."

The effort which had been made was not however fruitless. Those who were interested in the matter

had been brought together, and on Oct. 23rd, 1862, a Committee was formed for obtaining the admission of women to university examinations. It had been represented that the University of London objected to being made a *corpus vile* on which all experiments were to be tried, and that any action taken at Oxford or Cambridge in favour of the claims of women would be a valuable encouragement to the younger University. The Committee accordingly made it their first business to work for the admission of girls to the Local Examinations, the only step which at that time the older universities could reasonably be asked to take on behalf of women. They entered into communication with the local committees, and a member of one of them, Mr. Acland, gave valuable advice. He told us that the secret of his success in originating, conjointly with Dr. Temple, the Oxford Local Examinations, was that they had, as a preliminary step, held an examination similar to that which they desired to see established by the University—"we showed at Exeter that our ideas could march." Mr. Acland wrote from Oxford on May 8th, 1863:

"I think it might be worth while to form a Committee in London or elsewhere which would guarantee *all expenses*, including payment *pro rata* to examiners for additional work, and then to apply to the Delegates for leave to print off some additional examination papers (that must be done here of course to secure secrecy), and for leave to make a private arrangement with the examiners to look over the answers and to receive their report. I am strongly of opinion that the