

**THE RIVERSIDE LIBRARY
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PEOPLE, NUMBER
8. GIRLS AND WOMEN**

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The Riverside Library for Young People, Number 8. Girls and Women by Harriet E. Paine (E. Chester)

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HARRIET E. PAINE (E. CHESTER)

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The Riverside Library for Young People



NUMBER 8

GIRLS AND WOMEN

By E. CHESTER

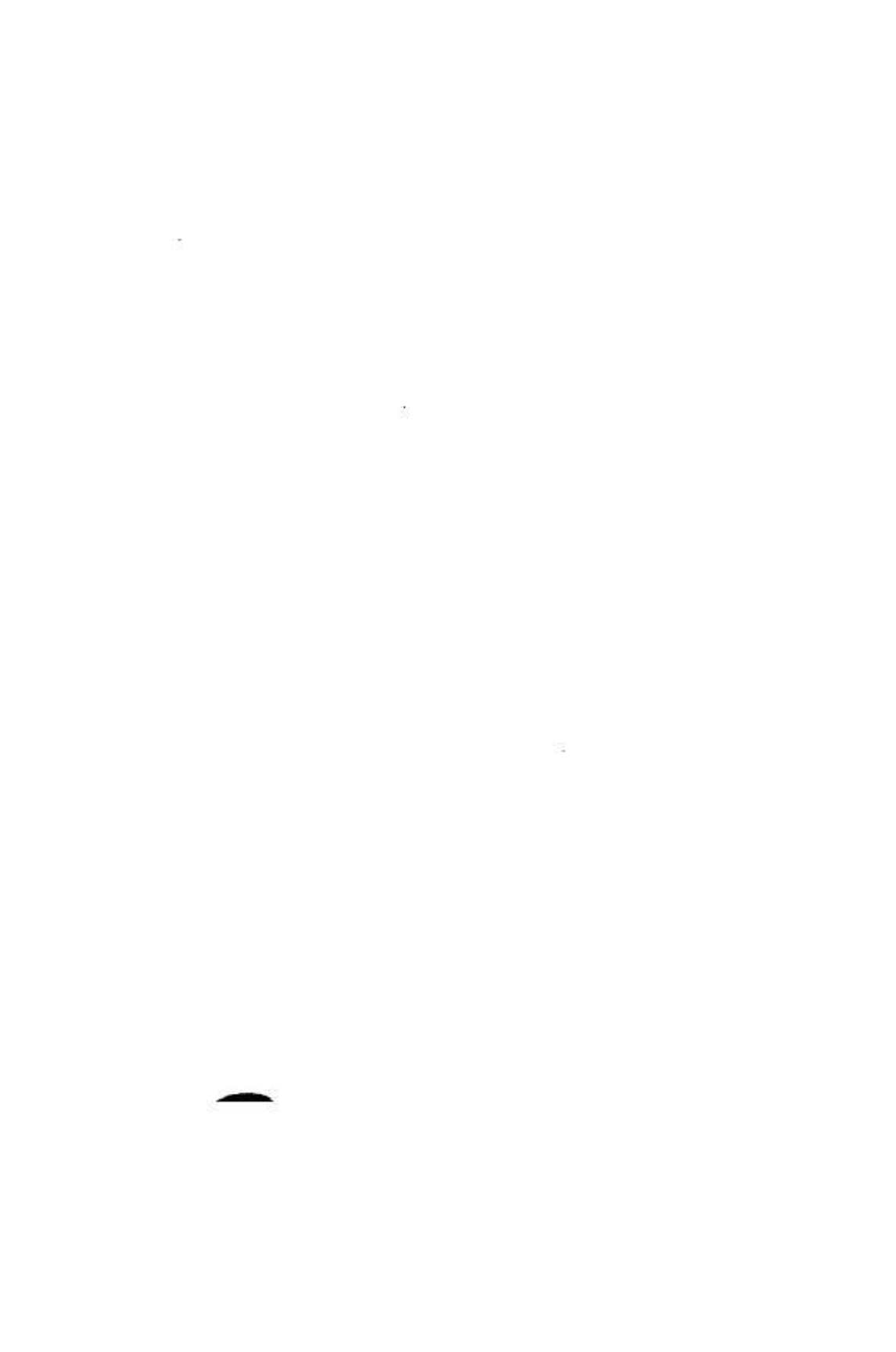


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GIRLS AND WOMEN.

I.

AN AIM IN LIFE.

FOR the sake of girls who are just beginning life, let me tell the stories of some other girls who are now middle-aged women. Some of them have succeeded and some have failed in their purposes, and often in a surprising way.

I remember a girl who left school at seventeen with the highest honors. Immediately we began to see her name in the best magazines. The heavy doors of literature seemed to swing open before her. Then suddenly we heard no more of her. A dozen years later she was known to no one outside her own circle. She was earning her living as book-keeper in a large five-cent store! She led the life of a drudge, and that was not the worst of it. She was a sensitive woman, and there was much that was mortifying in her position. All her Greek and Italian books were packed away. She knew no more of science than when she left school. At odd minutes she read

good novels, and that was all she had to do with literature. Those who had expected much of her thought her life was a failure, and she thought so too.

Yet there is another side to the picture. The aim she had set for herself in life was not to be an author, though that idea had taken strong hold on her, and she tried to realize it in spite of great discouragements. This was her minor aim, but the grand aim with her had always been to lead the divine life at whatever cost. It proved to cost almost everything. Her utmost help was needed for her large family, which was poor. Unusual as her success with editors had been, no girl of seventeen could depend on a large income from magazines. A good salary was offered her as book-keeper, and she accepted it.

She tried to continue her favorite occupation by rising early, but she was not strong enough to go on long in that way. She sometimes had an hour in the evening, but when she saw the wistful look in her mother's face she would not shut herself up alone. At the rare times when she was still free to choose she went back to her books and her pen, but she could not do much, and at last she felt it would be better not to try. It was simply a source of vexation, and she needed a serene mind above all things.

The only way her life could open towards beauty or happiness at all was by putting the true spirit

into her daily work. With a resolute heart she did this. No books were ever more beautifully kept than hers; every figure was clear and perfect; every column was added without a mistake. In short, she did her work like an artist.

To the sales-girls she was like a guardian angel. She might have written good stories all her life without helping others half so much. Little, weak, frivolous girls became strong, fine women simply from daily contact with her. She did not realize that. She only knew that she loved the girls and that they loved her. She did know that she helped her family — with her money. Her spirit helped them unconsciously still more.

When at last she gave up the minor aim of her life, and no longer tried to be learned or famous, she had her energies set free for many little things which had previously been crowded out. It was easy now to find a leisure hour to help any one who needed sympathy. There was time to watch the beauty of the sunset or of the falling snow. If she had no time to scramble through a volume of a new poet, she could still learn line by line some favorite old poem, and let it sink into her heart, so that it did its work thoroughly. If she could not find time to learn the history of all the artists from the time of Phidias to the last New York exhibition, yet when a beautiful picture was before her she could look at it thoughtfully *without feeling* that she must hurry on to

the next. In this way, perhaps, she gained a more absolute culture than in the way she would have chosen, a culture of thought and character which told on every one who came near her.

She was always climbing up towards God, and his help never failed her. The climbing was hard, yet the pathway was radiant with light. Those who were stumbling along in the darkness by her side saw the light and were able to walk erect.

I cannot say she was altogether happy with so many of her fine powers unused. Perhaps she was not even quite right in sacrificing herself completely. Sometimes she fostered selfishness in others while she tried to cast it out of herself. But so far as she could see she had no choice. If she had refused the sacrifice, it would have been by giving up the grand aim of her life. Her minor aim was good in itself, but it conflicted with something better. Those who did not know her life intimately thought it a failure. Those who saw deeper knew that her utter failure in what was non-essential had been the condition of essential success.

I remember another brilliant girl who did win her way. She was poor and plain and friendless, but she won wealth and fame and friends, and then, with all this success, she blossomed into *beauty*. She had a struggle, but she came out