

**SOME IDEALS IN
THE EDUCATION OF
WOMEN**

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Some ideals in the education of women by Caroline Hazard

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SOME IDEALS
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I.

It is a striking fact that from the earliest times, when men found a deity for every emotion and experience, so many of the virtues should have been personified by goddesses. The old mythology gives us not only a Venus, but a Diana, — not only dancing bacchantes and nymphs for every grove and stream, but the higher conception of Pallas Athene, the divine wisdom which led and inspired men. This personification was at a time when women were not held in special honor, when the modest woman was unlearned, — and yet men clothed what was their highest and purest conception in a female form. The instinct to reduce an abstraction to a concrete embodiment seems to be strong upon the race. "These be your gods, O Israel!" is the natural cry of primitive man, when appalled by the terror of the unseen. We lay hold with a feeling of security

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upon some tangible object, and in the groping of the mind for truth, the serene smile of the noble Pallas Athene comforted and consoled the hearts of men.

With the coming of Christianity the personification took a new form. It was no longer Juno with her peacocks, or Ceres with her fruitful horn of plenty, or even Persephone, — most spiritual of all creations of the antique world, — but the virtues themselves which became feminine. Humility, Chastity, Mercy readily took their place in the art and life of the middle age, bodied forth as holy women by the painters who painted for the sanctification of the soul rather than for the satisfaction of the eye. But more than these, the sterner virtues — even-handed Justice, with her bandaged eyes, Law, and Fortitude strong to endure — became splendid feminine figures.

In that wonderful series of frescoes in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, there they all are, — Faith, Hope, and Charity, Temperance, Prudence, Justice, and Fortitude, — while lower down is the strait gate through which Grammar, the art of language, is leading two boys and a girl. Some scoffers have intimated that this was the proper proportion of students, but we may comfort ourselves that the old Florentine painter, be he

Simone Memmi or Taddeo Gaddi, believed that some girls, at least, should enter on that arduous way. Following Language, Rhetoric comes; Logic, the art of right thinking, treads close upon the power of Expression; then Music, Astronomy, the uplifting science, Geometry, and Arithmetic come in turn. To each of these the girl and boys are to be led — each a beautiful woman's figure with her appropriate symbol. Why are they not men to the painter's imagination? Under each figure is painted the imaginary portrait of a man who has accomplished much in the science — Aristotle represented under Logic, Cicero under Rhetoric. But the ideal of all excellence, the perfection which still draws men on, is embodied in that mystical female figure, robed and crowned, or searching heaven with upturned gaze. The seven Theological virtues are also depicted, completing what was to the painter a survey of human life, on its spiritual as well as its natural side. Thus the most beautiful of all created forms is endowed by the artist's imagination with all perfections of character. As a lover clothes his mistress with all possible attributes of loveliness and virtue, so these women stand before us, — wise, learned, holy, and beautiful, — types of the ideal which men from time immemorial have sought in womanhood.

The persistence of the ideal, how wonderful it is! It dominates the minds of men as if it had life in itself. From one generation to another it renews itself, varying in expression, assuming new forms, but ever with the ceaseless longing of the soul groping after an ultimate good, if haply it may find it! It is this which has established the worship of the Virgin Mary so firmly in the hearts of mankind. The divinity of motherhood in her finds its embodiment, and so long as men love their mothers, so long will she remain the type of all that is most lovely and noble in a woman.

It is true that ideals change. The days of the "elegant female," of Pamela and Evelina, are happily gone by. Raven tresses and tears and frequent faintings are no longer in fashion. Poor things, they had to give such heed to their "shapes," it is no wonder they fainted on the least provocation, owing to the pressure on the vital organs. Even Elizabeth Bennet with all her good sense and spicy wit would find herself a little out of place in a company of modern girls. "Without a governess you must have been neglected," Lady Catherine says to her with much frankness. "Such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means," Elizabeth replies. "We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose

to be idle certainly might." And Dorothea Brooke, one of the most perfect women of fiction, of history, one is inclined to say, — for it seems as if George Eliot must have looked into her own heart when she described her so faithfully, — even she, who will live as long as English literature endures, — she would have had a different training at the end of the century.

Our modern young woman, with her good physique, corresponds much more closely to the old Greek conception of Plato, who in the ideal republic wished to have both his young men and women trained in athletic exercises. Even in that day Plato had to face the possibility of ridicule in having men and women do the same thing. "We must not fear," he says, "the jests of wits which will be directed against this sort of innovation, how they will talk of women's attainments in music, as well as in gymnastics, and above all about their wearing armor and riding upon horseback." So that the possibility of a woman's accomplishment in any unusual walk of life was even then considered something to be marvelled at. For Plato goes on, "Ought not men and women to have different tasks imposed upon them such as are agreeable to their different natures?" And he replies, "Certainly they ought." But then he proceeds to define a "different nature"