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Edited by L. C. Knights, H. A. Mason, F. R. Leavis and W. H. Mellers

Excerpt

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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

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HENRY SIDGWICK'S CAMBRIDGE

S LIGHT and fragmentary as are the reminiscences of Mary Paley Marshall, the University Press must be congratulated on having published them,¹ with their historically valuable photographs, as a more generally available reminder of a very remarkable woman and context than the interesting obituary notice that Lord Keynes contributed to the *Economic Journal* in 1944. As Professor Trevelyan writes in his introduction, 'her intimate personal experiences of the very first beginnings of women's education in connection with Cambridge University' is 'historically the most valuable part of the book'. It is a reminder of the most revolutionary period in Cambridge's history, already so remote as to be almost mythical and apparently almost forgotten. Mary Paley, who died three years ago at the age of ninety-four (working daily, till within two years of her death, in the Marshall Library she established in memory of her husband), was one of the first batch of women students at Cambridge, when 'female higher education' was being planted here by Henry Sidgwick and his friends. For he is the key name of this period, as can be seen equally from her memories and from those of many others. To read Mrs. Woolf and other feminists one would conclude that university education for girls was actually forced into being by women in the face of the brutal resistance of hostile mankind. In point of fact the initiative was either taken by men or encouraged by them, and in Cambridge at least the experiment depended for its success entirely on the work of a great many distinguished Cambridge men who were impelled by conscience and benevolence alone to give their time and energies and lend their names to the cause (I don't mean what later became known as The Cause).

The indefensible kind of opposition to higher education for women came from the man in the street, to whom the lead was given by women like Charlotte Yonge and Queen Victoria—reinforced by another kind of woman whose motives are suggested in this anecdote of Mrs. Fawcett's (I quote her reminiscences from memory): the wife of some important Cambridge figure expressed thankfulness to her that 'that place' [Newnham] was not there in her husband's younger days. 'Why not?' 'Because if it had been I am sure he would have married one of them instead of me'. It must have been because of such Cambridge ladies that Sidgwick, according to a (probably heightened) story told to Mrs. Marshall,

¹*What I Remember*, by Mary Paley Marshall (Cambridge University Press, 7/6).

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'in those early days of the movement walked up and down wringing his hands and saying: "If it were not for their unfortunate appearance" '—meaning that his young ladies tended to be handsome and well-dressed. A respectable opposition came from those dons who saw in Sidgwick's scheme the first steps towards turning a man's university into a co-educational one, an objection that shows to-day as highly prophetic.² Even Marshall the great economist, whose early sympathies were entirely with the movement and who worked for it and married into it, dug his heels in at a given point. 'When the great trial of strength came in 1896 over the proposal to grant women's degrees he abandoned the friends of a lifetime and took, whatever his wife might think and feel, the other side'.³ Similarly Miss Emily Davies found that even academics hostile in theory were prepared to do all they could to help her up to a certain point. When in 1880 she wished to get the University to appoint members to help govern Girton College she wrote 'I was agreeably surprised at finding people most friendly, and I feel encouraged as to our prospects altogether. I went to see the Vice-Chancellor (Dr. Perowne), who was supposed to be unfavourable, and found him very gracious. The Master of Trinity, who I had been told was our great enemy, expressed his willingness to make the proposal for us!' Perowne was the leader of the Conservative party in Cambridge, and 'fundamentally opposed to the admission of women in any form'. But he was quite willing to help women to a university education separately; in this he was representative of the opposition.

²The fear that Cambridge would be gradually turned into a mixed university if any concessions were made was grounded in the declared ambitions of Miss Davies and her supporters. The one thing all the promoters of women's higher education could agree upon was that they would not have a separate women's university. Royal Holloway College was actually endowed and built on a scale which should enable it to set up as a women's university but the Governors convened a conference (1897) and rejected the idea. 'No one' said James Bryce summing up for them, 'is in favour of having a separate University for Women'. At the outset of her campaign, before anything practical had been effected, Miss Davies wrote (1868) 'The College is intended to be a dependency, a living branch of Cambridge. It will aim at no higher position than, say, that of Trinity College'. 'Such a degree of humility will not be considered excessive' was the *Times* comment. The rejection in '87 of the proposal to grant women degrees was due to 'the fears of those who, as Dr. MacAlister said, felt that they were being asked to adopt a tiger cub on the grounds "that it is such a little one, and can't do any harm, and won't be in the way, and will please the children very much"' [Emily Davies and Girton College].

³Keynes, *Economic Journal*, June, 1944. He continues: 'But Mary Marshall had been brought up to know, and also to respect and accept what men of "strict principles" were like'.

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In 1868 Henry Sidgwick was writing⁴ to his sister:

'Do you know I am violently engaged in a scheme for improving female education? A Board is constituted of Oxford and Cambridge men (no end of swells, including the people who have refused Bpcs., etc.).'

Next year he reports that his proposals for establishing Lectures for Women that could be examined on met with 'considerable support from members of the University', and in the same year writing to F. W. Myers 'about female prospects' he said 'The fact is there is no real conservatism anywhere among educated men. Only *vis inertiae*'.⁵ In a widely-read letter he contributed to *The Spectator* at the beginning of 1869 he remarks: 'Whatever may be said in favour of a different school education for the two sexes, the present exclusion of women from the higher studies of the University is perfectly indefensible in principle and must sooner or later give way'.⁶ His wife and brother make it clear that there was a male genealogy: 'Sidgwick had had his thoughts turned in a general way to the subject of the education of women by the writings of John Stuart Mill and doubtless also by F. D. Maurice, whose interest in it is well known, and who was, as we have seen, at this time Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge'. The outcome of all this was that his proposal that lectures should be organized at Cambridge for women and examined on was sponsored by Henry Fawcett, Professor of Political Economy, and his wife,⁷ a committee was formed, Sidgwick took on the secretarial duties and drew up a scheme of lectures, and scholarships were provided for students to take advantage of the opportunity to improve themselves. In 1871 Sidgwick decided that what the movement needed was a Cambridge home, so he took a house for students on his own responsibility, financial and otherwise; he was then thirty-three and a bachelor, with no means but what he earned. He persuaded Miss Clough to take charge of his household, and enlisted such coming men as Alfred Marshall to teach with him there. Thus did Sidgwick initiate Newnham College. [For two years later, after

⁴Henry Sidgwick: *A Memoir*, by A.S. and E.M.S. (1906).

⁵When in 1868 Dr. Henry Jackson thought it likely that Cambridge could be induced to hold exams. for women, even Sidgwick did not expect immediate success, but 'a memorial, taken round by Mr. James Stuart (later Professor of Mathematics), was signed by 74 members of the Senate, including some of the most rigid conservatives'.

⁶This must have been generally felt, for only four years later 'twenty-two out of the thirty-four Professors then existing opened their courses to women. More followed later, and inter-collegiate lectures also gradually became available'.

⁷Thus making it possible for their daughter Philippa in due course to become Senior Wrangler (13% ahead of the male runner-up).

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additional houses had been taken, it was decided to build; 'Newnham Hall' was opened in '75 for thirty students, and when Miss Clough died in '92 and Mrs. Sidgwick (Arthur Balfour's sister) was called on to succeed her as Principal of Newnham College he cheerfully gave up his house and went to live there for the rest of his life, he being Professor of Moral Philosophy].

One of those who took this newly-founded Cambridge Higher Local Examination for women was Mary Paley. Educated like so many Victorian women by mere governesses and fathers, she nevertheless was successful enough to be offered one of the first Cambridge scholarships. Hence the piquant spectacle of the grandson of Paley's *Evidences*, an Evangelical cleric, bringing his daughter up to Cambridge in '71 to place her in the charge of the sister of the infidel poet Clough (her orthodoxy was in fact gradually undermined, by, as she writes, 'Mill's Inductive Logic and *Ecce Homo* and Herbert Spencer and the general tone of thought'). There were four other students that year.

Parallel with all this was the development of Girton College. Miss Emily Davies refused to compromise the principle of identical studies and examinations for women and men by acquiescing in the Cambridge Committee's scheme and against advice she established at Hitchin in '69 a rival band of students. But as there were no other instructors available, she had to ask for help from the university. Hitchin was inconveniently placed, 'so that each teacher would have to throw away three hours spent in travelling' each time. Yet Sidgwick, with many more of the Cambridge Committee, was 'interested in this scheme too and was from the beginning and for many years on its staff of lecturers'. It says a great deal for the principles and good-nature of the men that though they had reported against Hitchin as a site, and urged Cambridge instead, they gave their services ungrudgingly, and Miss Davies wrote that all the teachers she had in view on opening were 'of the first rank'.⁸

When in a few years a fund enabled building at Girton to be started, a strong objection still held: Sarah Burstall, the future famous Head of the Manchester High School, came up to Girton in '78⁹ to take the Maths. Tripos and reported:

'All our work was private coaching with such Cambridge men as could be induced to come out three times a week, nearly two dull miles of a long walk along the Huntingdon Road, to take on the teaching of young women, often ill-prepared and unlikely to reflect honour on their teachers. Naturally, first-rate men only came if they were friends of the College and believers in the movement. I was fortunate enough to be taught by three such men'. [*Retrospect and Prospect*].

⁸*Emily Davies and Girton College*, by Barbara Stephen (1927).

⁹On a scholarship given by a Cambridge man who for many years devoted the income from his Fellowship to this purpose.

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More than one Senior Wrangler had taken the trouble to go out to Hitchin in the early days to 'pour an amazing illumination on elementary mathematics'.

One of the great advantages enjoyed by the original women students was that only first-rate men taught them; the in-breeding and consequently much more limited choice of teachers that the development of the women's colleges at Cambridge has brought about is obviously not ideal. Mary Paley and her few fellow-students who decided to take the Moral Science Tripos (which then included economics) enjoyed almost individual tuition from such outstanding teachers and thinkers as Sidgwick and Venn and Alfred Marshall, men who were either Professors already or who later held chairs, who were moreover intellectual pioneers engaged in opening up new branches of study. Mrs. Marshall says that they had 'practically the same lectures as the men' but given to them separately, so the devoted lecturers 'had to give their lectures twice over' (not to speak of a possible third time at Hitchin). The women had to take their Tripos papers separately from the men, and the papers were brought from the Senate House post-haste by voluntary 'runners', among whom were such eminent (bearded) academics as the logician Venn, Sidgwick, Marshall and Sedley Taylor. The early women students at Cambridge, in spite of their generally irregular education and lack of the advantages inherent in emancipation, seem to have had access to many of the best minds of a great age here—Cambridge stirred to educational and intellectual reform by the large group of gifted men known as the Cambridge Liberals. The other advantage the women pioneers enjoyed was that they had not been through the mill of the examination grind and the other shaping influences of the good girls' schools nor been tested by the 'sieve' of the Entrance Scholarship Examination.¹⁰

Mrs. Marshall's reminiscences give us striking pictures, which can be compared with and supplemented by those quoted in *Emily Davies and Girton College*, of the women students before they became as a regular thing a tamer variety, 'mostly Head Girls of good girls' schools' who superseded them, as Sarah Burstall noted. [Now, in the third stage, about 30% come from the state elementary schools, up the educational ladder, *i.e.*, through the examination sieves]. But the original students were expected to come from the Hall and the Rectory and the homes of professional men and manufacturers, according to Emily Davies. These were not docile, down-trodden or meek-spirited, though they were certainly ladies. In 1872 poor Sidgwick was already complaining: 'This term has been rather

¹⁰In reviewing Mary Agnes Hamilton's *Newnham* in *Scrutiny* (June, 1936) our reviewer, a Senior Student of Girton, said that 'it is not so easy to share Mrs. Hamilton's enthusiasm for present conditions' and remarked, as a schoolmistress herself, that 'a doubt remains as to how far the sieve for the selection of the best-fitted entrants is effective'.

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a trying one. There is such a strong impulse towards liberty among the young women attracted by the movement that they will not submit to maternal government'. In fact, they were not schoolgirls but 'women of character', even though some of them were but sixteen years old—'really very outstanding people' said Miss Dove who entered the Hitchin 'College' in '71; 'all people of some force of character, or they would not have been there' wrote Barbara Stephen. Samples of their conversation and deportment noted by Mrs. Marshall are startling. Henry Sidgwick rebuked a young lady who cut his lecture—'You should apologize', to which she replied: 'Is it a case for two cups of coffee and pistols?' Invited *en masse* to Marshall's rooms in college on Sunday evenings they complained that he had not provided a 'back glass' for their hair, and the poor anchorite (after enquiring what a back glass was) had to buy one. Miss Paley, at a dance at a college Lodge, invited Marshall to dance the Lancers and in spite of his protests of ignorance pushed him through the figures. Soon after she took her final examinations they became engaged—'Miss Clough pretended to be shocked' but gave them a sitting-room where they collaborated on a text-book which 'contained the germs of much that appeared later in the *Principles of Economics*'. They married and she looked after him and his writing for the rest of his life. Naturally these young women looked down on undergraduates as 'boys', as she writes, and felt that it was for the society of dons that they had come. The women's colleges from the very beginning had evidently two functions. If on the one hand they were to provide Heads for the new girls' schools and women's colleges that began to spring up everywhere, they had an equally important function in providing distinguished academics with suitable wives. The seal was set on this latter activity when Miss Agnata Ramsay, who in '87 was placed alone in the first division of the first class of the Classical Tripos, married the Master of Trinity. Though it was not till '81 that women were permitted to take the examination on exactly the same footing as men and had their names published in class lists, yet they had never suffered for want of countenance and support, and their occasional outstanding successes were received with the greatest generosity. In 1880 the first woman Wrangler appeared; 'the exact places of women candidates were not published, but it was privately known that she was equal to the eighth Wrangler. When the Mathematical Lists were read in the Senate House [to an audience of undergraduates] loud cheers for "Scott of Girton" made it impossible to hear the name of the eighth Wrangler'.— [*Hertha Ayrton: A Memoir* by Evelyn Sharp].

The advantage that the earlier women students enjoyed then was the difference between being coached for examinations and being educated by liberal minds of a certain stamp. When we enquire what these educators were like we find that they had in common certain characteristics, whatever subjects engaged their particular attention. They were open-minded men of very considerable personal culture who subscribed to an idea of a liberal

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education and to the highest standard of disinterestedness. To read the life and letters of Sidgwick is to make the acquaintance of a different world from our own. When Sidgwick died there was a rare outpouring of feeling from his many famous old pupils, who included Dr. Keynes, Sorley, Arthur Balfour and Professor Maitland. The great Maitland said 'I believe he was a supremely great teacher', spoke of his 'rare intellectual virtue' and after describing his lectures as something altogether extraordinary ended: 'We turned to other studies or pursuits, but the memories of Sidgwick's lectures lived on . . . the method remained, the spirit remained, as an ideal'. One of the undistinguished pupils wrote, significantly: 'The rigid attention necessary to follow him in lecture some found almost too great a strain'. He was incapable of popularizing and lectured and taught always at the highest level. He had started as a Fellow of Trinity by teaching Classics for eight years, but becoming completely sceptical of the value of Classics in education he became interested in subjects which came under the Moral Science Tripos. The year 1868 gives a good cross-section of his character. He was at that time (aet. 29) leading the group of Trinity reformers whose 'thirteen proposals', drafted by himself, included a scheme for awarding scholarships and fellowships for Natural Science, appointment of officials to teach and direct studies in different departments, and the abolition of the religious tests of conformity to the Church of England taken by Fellows on their election, proposals which, as he wrote to his brother, 'open an almost unlimited vista of reform as soon as possible'. Most were carried but not the proposal to abolish religious tests, which would have enabled Dissenters and Roman Catholics and agnostics to hold fellowships. Whereupon Sidgwick resigned his Assistant Tutorship and Fellowship in protest, risking cutting short altogether his university career for an abstract principle, since he remained a member of the Church. Trinity, however, unwilling to lose him as Trinity Hall had lost Leslie Stephen on almost the same issue, offered him a post as lecturer in Moral Sciences (which carried no dogmatic obligations), so he merely had a much diminished income. Winstanley in his severely legalistic history of Victorian Cambridge is moved by Sidgwick's resignation to the only spark of feeling in the volume: 'It was the purely voluntary act of a high-minded and very scrupulous man who thought no sacrifice too great on behalf of honesty' he writes. 'It is impossible to exaggerate the moral splendour of his action'. Other Trinity Fellows followed his example and resigned, so that the whole matter came up again for consideration and next year the tests were abolished at Trinity. The following year the religious tests in the universities were abolished by Act of Parliament (1871). Sidgwick's Cambridge was therefore a place where it was possible to be a moral hero and find plenty of backers. A Sidgwick was not isolated, he represented rather the most visible point of growth. Behind him was an intellectual ancestry in which John Stuart Mill and Clerk Maxwell counted for much; he was the friend of George Eliot and her novels owe much to this world.

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A similar history surrounds his educational activities. We have seen how the schemes he founded for 'female education' bore immediate fruit. But they were only one section of his plans. In 1868 also, besides working for the women's cause he was giving a great deal of attention to what could be done for the men. Thoroughly disillusioned about Classics he was trying, in common with others at Cambridge, to form a fresh centre for a liberal education. 'We have a new *University Gazette* . . . it is going to contain all the newest educational notions' he had written. 'I hope the thing will lead to a good deal of healthy discussion'. Sidgwick's contributions were on improvement of Little-Go, reform of the Classical Tripos, the study of English, and revision of the College lecture system, 'including free competition among lecturers. He argued that under a system of free competition bad lecturing would "be driven entirely out of the field"'. [Imagine the outrage of an attempt to discuss comparable issues in a University organ to-day!]. This is another testimony both to the immense stir of life in the Cambridge of that age and to the liberal atmosphere. In the same year appeared a co-operative enterprise, *Essays on a Liberal Education*, to which Sidgwick contributed an essay of startling modernity called 'The Theory of a Classical Education'. Of this he wrote in a letter to Oscar Browning: 'Curiously, while you half charge me with writing beyond my serious belief, I have not written up to it. If we had only first-rate teachers and textbooks of the subjects worth knowing, I should be inclined to pitch the Classics overboard. But one great advantage of literature as an instrument of education is that it supplements a teacher's defects so much. Temple is moving for English, as you probably know'.

Sidgwick was also moving for English, in association with other modern literatures. [Besides his classical training, which he had supplemented with Hebrew and Arabic, he had read and kept up with French, German and Italian literature¹¹ and seems to have studied history intensively. He became a specialist on moral and political philosophy and delivered papers on sociology, economics and so forth. One might compare the intellectual career of W. H. Rivers]. It was his dissatisfaction with the results of a classical training that made him opposed to Emily Davies's fanatical insistence on women's taking the Little-Go. He arranged for special terms for his 'house of study' for women; instead of the Previous with its compulsory Latin and Greek they could take a local exam. 'with its liberal scheme of options' which he thought not only better adapted to the intellectual condition of girls at the time but likely to give a lead to university and school reforms for the men. He declined to join Miss Davies's demand for admission of women to degrees (including the notoriously disgraceful Pass Degree) on the same terms as men because it would have meant their taking Little-Go. As he wrote to her, he was 'not opposed to identity of

¹¹He used to give lectures on English and French literature to the Newnham students.

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conditions for the two sexes'¹² but he was 'determined if possible to prevent the University from applying to the education of girls the pressure in the direction of classics that would inevitably be given if the present Previous Examination were made compulsory for female students preparing for Triposes' (1887). Nevertheless when Miss Davies (who resorted to unpleasant texts from the Bible to describe people like the Fawcetts and Sidgwick if they disagreed with her) met Sidgwick to discuss their differences, she was obliged to admit '“He certainly is a very engaging man”—an expression of real feeling on her part' [*Emily Davies and Girton College*]. She was not a woman to be imposed on by specious personal charm. The special nature of Sidgwick's personality has been described by many well-known men, and just as he expressed his admiration for the personality of Cambridge men like Fawcett¹³ in terms of character so his own was always felt by his pupils and colleagues to be entirely an emanation of character. Maitland, talking of his 'teaching the like of which had never come in my way before', described 'the freest and boldest thinking set forth in words which seemed to carry candour and sobriety and circumspection to their furthest limit. I believe no more truthful man than Sidgwick ever lived. I am speaking of a rare intellectual virtue . . . a mind that was indeed marvellously subtle but was showing us its wonderful power simply because even in a lecture-room it could be content with nothing less than the maximum of attainable and communicable truth'. Sorley trying to describe Sidgwick's influence wrote: 'Sidgwick exerted a powerful influence, both intellectual and moral, upon his pupils. But his temperament was too critical, his intellect too evenly balanced, to admit of his teaching a dogmatic system. What he taught was much more a method, an attitude of mind . . . candour, self-criticism and regard for truth'. No wonder it has been suggested that Sidgwick was the original of Daniel Deronda, at least as regards the effect Deronda was supposed to have on others. But the point to make is that Sidgwick was not a 'sport' in his time and place. He had been produced by the Cambridge of his youth just as a later Cambridge of men like Maitland was produced from his. Leslie Stephen in *Some Early Impressions* (Hogarth Press) gives a good account of this formative ethos. He remarks upon the influence of the 'Apostles', of which the most important member in his time was Clerk Maxwell the great physicist; it was to this society that

¹²He had written earlier 'I ask only a fair field and no favour for professional women'.

¹³When Fawcett died in 1884 Sidgwick wrote in his journal: 'He was a hero of a peculiar type, without any outward air of self-sacrifice or suggestion of idealism in his ordinary talk' and a year later when Munro (the editor of *Lucretius*) died: 'Two of the most strongly marked figures and characters of Cambridge have gone in Fawcett and Munro, alike in a certain rugged vigour and naturalness, if in little else'.