

## FOUNDERS AND BENEFACTORS

My father, John Peile, was a prominent member of the party of progress in the University. He was one of the founders of Newnham College for women, and was President of its Council until his death. His were the first college lectures in Cambridge open to women.

The need of a college for women was felt, where they could live and avail themselves of the opportunities then possible. Mother used to describe the first meeting about Newnham, held in the house of Professor Henry Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General, when Mrs Fawcett (afterwards Dame Millicent) sat on a little stool by the fireside, next to her husband, in order to give an informal air to the proceedings, which were felt to be revolutionary!

A small company was formed, a little house taken, and Miss Clough, sister of the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, was brought from Liverpool to be its head. I can just remember, as a tiny child, going with mother when she went to welcome Miss Clough on her arrival. (The temporary quarters on Miss Clough's arrival were in Panton Street.) She used to tell with amusement how Professor Henry Sidgwick came to her lamenting the 'unfortunate personal appearance' of the first students! They were all remarkably good-looking women, and the founders of the movement were anxious not to be conspicuous in any way. (Most of the first women students wore pre-raphaelite garments.)

Miss Clough was a somewhat formidable person, and approached her duties as head of a women's college in more of the spirit of the school-mistress than of a college don; but it is difficult now to realize what need there was for wisdom in avoiding opposition as much as possible. She was very careful of the health as well as the intellectual training of her students, and I remember an unfortunate student who was in bed with a bad cold when Miss Clough discovered that she did not possess a red flannel petticoat.

H. M. Kempthorne (Peile). Extract from a notebook, *c.* 1869



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## THE FIRST FIVE STUDENTS

In 1870 I was startled by receiving from the Secretary of the Cambridge Syndicate a suggestion that as a result of my success in the Local Examinations\* I should come up to Cambridge to continue my studies. So in 1870 I was installed in a tiny bedroom in a girls' boarding-school on Parker's Piece. I didn't know anyone in the place and my brother who was up at Corpus was so annoyed with my venture that he wouldn't speak to me! At first there appeared to be no one else in my position but



M. Wright (Kennedy)'s drawing of Henry Sidgwick lecturing to the first women students: she entitled it 'Ye great philosopher delivering his lecture'

after two days I was joined by Felicia Larnar and then by a Miss Wood. I had another year of Local Exams in view. We could choose our own subjects and no curriculum was suggested. In the light of what followed I always looked upon myself as the very first Newnham student. I found the lectures absorbingly interesting but life at the boarding-school was

\* The Cambridge Local Examinations, run by the Local Examinations Syndicate, were opened to women in 1864. Passes in the Higher Local Examination would gain exemption from the Previous Examination (see note, p. 14). The papers for this examination were arranged in lettered Groups, not all of which were defined by a single subject category as, for instance, Group C (Mathematics); and from time to time the Groups regrouped. Further references to the Higher Local are made below, especially by E. M. Sharpley and B. A. Clough.

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austere and dull. After two terms of it I decided to take a term off and come up again in October. This I did and entered myself as a boarder in the new house in Regent Street which was opened to receive girl students from the provinces. Henry Sidgwick was the leading spirit among those in Cambridge who sought to advance the women's cause. He it was who took this house, furnished it from his own pocket and arranged for Miss Clough, an old friend, to come and act as housekeeper for the students. There were five of us who came up in 1871 – myself; Mary Paley, who was to become my life-long friend; Edith Creak, a clever sixteen-year-old; Ella Bulley, and Annie Migault. One day Alfred Marshall, our lecturer in Political Economy, stopped Mary Paley and me in the street and asked us if we had ever thought of working for a Tripos examination.\* He explained that this would mean at least three years' study, specializing in one or two subjects. We accepted the challenge lightly, not realizing what we were undertaking. Mary and I decided on the Moral Science Tripos for which we were devotedly coached by Henry Sidgwick and Alfred Marshall. Eventually we both obtained a Second Class. Edith Creak took both Classical and Mathematical Tripos and Felicia Lerner who had rejoined the little band got a Second in the Historical Tripos in 1875.

M. Wright (Kennedy, 1871)

\* Before their formal admission to Tripos examinations, women took the examinations informally by special arrangement with the examiners, who might mark their papers as a favour.



#### 74 REGENT STREET

74 Regent Street had been taken for us by Mr Henry Sidgwick who had spent his Long Vacation time and money in getting it ready. In a letter which he wrote in 1871 he says: 'I am not going to take any real holiday this Long, I have no money. The cares of a household being incumbent, I find myself estimating the expenses of Plate, Linen etc.' So of course we wanted to be economical as well and my first recollections of Mr Sidgwick and Mr Marshall are the evenings when we sat round and sewed the household linen in Miss Clough's sitting-room. This was my first sight of Mr Marshall [whom she later married]. I then thought I had never seen such an attractive face with its delicate outline and brilliant eyes. We sat very silent and rather awed as we listened to them talking to Miss Clough on high subjects. But not always on those,

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for Mr Sidgwick was the most delightful conversationalist on any subject. I have known only one to equal him, Henry Smith of Oxford. Every subject Mr Sidgwick touched upon was never the same again. As someone said of him: 'If you so much as mentioned a duster in his presence he would glorify it on the spot.' His conversation made him sometimes inattentive to ordinary affairs and one day when he was helping us at dinner after using a tablespoon for the soup he pulled out the entire contents of the apple pie with the soup ladle, to our great delight. Though we were only five he found us rather troublesome. In another letter he writes: 'There is such a strong impulse towards liberty among the young women attracted by the movement that they will not submit to maternal government.'

Perhaps in those days Miss Clough was rather inclined to treat us like schoolgirls and in the small house we were at close quarters and of course had our meals together with her. But she was a woman with great power of growth and adaptation, and from being the mistress of a school in the North she gradually developed into the ideal Head of a College. Mary Kennedy and I were the worst offenders. For instance, one day we said to Miss Clough: 'We are going to spend the day at Ely and are not sure when we shall be back.' She did not say anything, but a rule appeared soon after in the *Report*: 'Students wishing to make expeditions in the neighbourhood must ask for permission from the Principal.' As it was we spent a happy day, chiefly in the Cathedral, and we ended by climbing the tower in the company of an agreeable young man but parted from him before returning to Cambridge. Mr Sidgwick, determined that the scheme he had so much at heart should not suffer from our troublesome conduct, came and gave us a good talking to and I as spokeswoman promised that we would turn over a new leaf. This turn was made easier because, with numbers increased to twelve, our next two years were spent at Merton Hall, with a dining-room large enough for separate tables, with its lovely garden where the nightingales kept us awake at nights and with its ancient School of Pythagoras supposed to be haunted, though the only ghosts which visited us were enormous spiders.

M. Paley Marshall (1871). Reprinted from *What I Remember*



1876

## NEWNHAM HALL

1875: October. Newnham Hall opened.\*

The following were among the terms of admission.

‘No Student is admitted under the age of 17.

The Principal may require any Student to withdraw, who in her opinion is not profiting by the course of study at Newnham Hall.

The Charge for board and lodging is at present £20 per term of eight weeks. Students intending to become teachers are received at present at a charge of £15 per term. (About half the Students at present in residence are received on the reduced terms.) The only extras are wine, and fires in Students’ rooms; fires are charged 4 guineas a year to ordinary Students, and 2 guineas to those intending to teach.

The payment for instruction varies slightly, according to the line of study taken up, but rarely exceeds 4 guineas for ordinary Students, and 2 guineas for those intending to become teachers.’

Extract from the North Hall Diary

\* See Introduction, p. xii.



## INNOCENT GAIETY

7 May 1876

My dearest Mamma,

You talk about enjoying the country; it is just like country here. We are completely private in our garden, and quite surrounded with country sights and sounds – cows and sheep in the fields round us, and birds of all sorts just outside the hedge. I think I have mentioned these said birds before, but I have never heard a word from any of you on the subject! I expected you to have been quite delighted at the idea of our hearing the nightingale, even in the house!

The lawn-tennis has come, and I have played several games. The Bander asked me the first evening, and was exceedingly gracious to me during, and after the game; of course, after; I play better than she does! We are rather put out about our cricket. Some of us, notably Miss Benton, Miss Ellis and I wanted very much to play, so Miss Ellis asked Miss Clough’s permission, wh. was granted at once. Whereupon we collected money for a bat and Miss Benton and I bought it yesterday morning. Well, yesterday evening we were just going to play, when Miss Clough

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came out and said she was sorry but she could not possibly let us play. She said it would spoil the grass, and after a little hesitation, said there were other reasons. We have not, of course, the slightest wish to do what she does not approve of, but I wish she had thought of her 'other reasons' when we first asked her. We hear now, that they used to play at Merton [Merton Hall, home of the College 1872-4], but that it was stopped, probably 'Mr Marshall's friends' objected.

We had a very interesting debate last Tuesday (little debate). The subject was Theatres as a means of Education. When I went into the room I had no intention of speaking, but I had to do so after all. Mary Ellis begged me so hard, and no one had said anything wh. at all suited my views. Evelyn began, very well indeed, but she was so nervous that she broke down in the middle, leaving her sentence unfinished. Miss Green came next. She stood up and spoke as if she had been accustomed all her life to Public Speaking. She said nothing worth hearing, however, uttering about two platitudes, wh. had no bearing on the subject, in an exceedingly forcible manner. Then Conny Brodhurst, and little Miss Hunt spoke, for a very few minutes, and then there was no one else. So I had to get up, and I made, I think, the best speech I have ever made in the little Debate. I really was intensely interested in my subject, and I did so want some of them to agree with me, and the result was that I spoke for some minutes without the slightest hesitation or difficulty, and, a thing I have never done before, spoke of my own feelings on the subject - I mean, what I really feel, not what I feel when I am asked my opinion. You may imagine how glad I was when Miss Benton rose and said she had come into the room, not caring much for the subject, but thinking that, on the whole, theatres were bad, but that she had been entirely convinced by what the last member had said. I am afraid I had rather offended Miss Green, for I had said that I thought no one except the first speaker had kept to the subject, for after Miss Benton's speech, she rose again and said she thought her anecdote (one that she told) was to the point, for it showed that 'the lower orders' could not appreciate Shakspeare, whose plays were certainly of a 'lofty and elevating tendency'. This sentence was aimed at me, for I had said that it must do us good to have our feelings moved by plays of an elevating tendency and had gone on to say that by this I meant, plays wh. roused in us impulses towards good, wh. showed us the evils around us and the remedies for those evils. Of course I had to answer, and I said that I thought I had distinctly explained what I meant by 'elevating' and that in the sense in wh. I used the word, I admitted that Shakspeare plays

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might not be of an elevating tendency to the mass of the people 'or as in our assumed superiority we choose to call them the *lower classes*', for they are often incomprehensible to them.

All the evening Evelyn kept saying 'I do admire you so, I never knew you were so nice. I am so glad you said what you did about theatres', and they were all (my friends, I mean) amused at my speech about 'the lower classes'. Conny Brodhurst said: 'I knew you would be up at that, I was sure you could not stand that'.

15 May 1876

I said in my last letter that I was going to none of the May gaities, but I find I was mistaken, as Mrs Bumpsted has asked me to lunch there tomorrow and go to the flower show in King's grounds with them, and Mrs Raynes has insisted on Miss Benton and I going to see the boat races with them on Thursday evening. However I have declined all the concerts, and flower shows and boat races are very innocent gaiety; they do not keep one up at night, and Tuesday and Thursday are my free days.

That sentence in my letter means if Papa does not promise to come up I shall overwork myself, in wh. case I shall look like a walking shadow, in wh. case Miss J and Miss Graves will write to him to come up in wh. case he will have to come; so that whether he decides to come or not eventually he will have to come, whether he likes it or no.

I will ask Miss Clough about lodgings. I daresay she will know of some.

13 November 1876

My dearest Papa,

I meant to have written to you yesterday but I had not time, so I do so to-night instead. I think I had better tell you what I do on Sundays or you will wonder how it is I cannot find time to write. Yesterday morning, I stayed in the dining hall after breakfast talking to Miss Jeffery, Miss Tovey, Evelyn, and May, till half-past ten. Then I read the papers, *Athenaeum*, *Spec.* and *Saturday* and wrote to Mamma; that took up the time till 1 o'clock. Then I went up to get ready for dinner. Directly after dinner Miss Ritchie asked me to come and see her, so I went and stayed till four o'clock, for just as I was going, about three, she insisted on my staying for tea wh. she was just going to make. So Miss Harrison came up and we had a delightful little party. Then from four till tea at a quarter past five, I practised. Then after tea I came upstairs to write but suddenly I thought I would hang up my pictures, wh. I did. It was



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great fun. I had to put a chair on my bed for one, get up on my chest of drawers for another and put a chair on my table for the others. I very nearly upset once. In taking the chair off the table, I forgot to keep on the middle part and stepped on the flap, whereupon the table tilted up and I had to make a bold jump with the chair in my hand into my armchair wh. was near, and so just saved myself and the table. I have put up my brackets and the paper rack with pins wh. keep them firm and cannot possibly hurt the walls, and as I have now stained and varnished my cupboard and bookcase, my room really looks very nice. Over the side of my bed is the water colour sketch and the large bracket under it; the large picture of the woman and child is over the mantelpiece, and on each side of the window come the others. My small brackets are on each side of the fireplace, and on the mantelpiece are Mendelssohn, the two groups, two upright vases, the flower basket and filter that Isabel gave me and a small china jar.

I have succeeded in 'humbugging' Mr Archer Hind, so that he does not dream of dismissing me to the other class, on the contrary he treats me with great respect, always asks my opinion of a difficult passage, etc. The other day I was bold enough to strike out a new idea. I did not at all like the meaning that was given in the notes of one passage so I told him that I had taken it as so and so, wh. interpretation the passage might bear for the word  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$  means distinct and independent. They took the former and read 'But the honour of the gods is distinct, i.e. we may not mingle words of ill omen with our praises of them'. I read 'But the honour of the gods is independent; i.e. whatever subsequent calamity may have befallen us, honour is due to the gods for the blessings they gave before'. He was very much interested when he heard my idea was original, and said it was a very good one. At first he seemed disposed to adopt it, but finally he said that the ordinary interpretation was perhaps more in accordance with Aeschylean ideas, tho' one might bear mine in mind. Wasn't that a triumph. After learning Greek about two months, to strike out a new interpretation of the *Agamemnon* and be told that it was a good one! Shan't I get conceited? And last time in giving me back my Berkeley he said: 'Well, Miss Merrifield, considering you have never read any Plato, you have done this as well as could possibly have been expected. I shall give you a much harder paper some day.'

Miss Ritchie does go to the Greek class; she did not go the first time, but she does now and she also has a coach, a Mr Jenkinson, for Latin and Greek. She gets very 'depressed' over her work and comes to me to be consoled. This coach is a great friend of her brother's and told



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him that she was 'very sharp but hopelessly inaccurate'. She was in a most melancholy state at the news, especially as she knows it is true. She gets at the general sense of a passage at once, and goes on with a sublime disregard for gender, number and case. Mr Jenkinson also teaches Miss Cann and Miss Tovey Latin and he says they are hopelessly stupid; so I asked him who would please him, whereupon he answered immediately: 'You, for you are so accurate and you have a tremendous enthusiasm too and appreciation of the subject'. You see, I have not got a character for inaccuracy as I had when I was younger, so I suppose that I no longer have the habit. I do not think I have. I think my mathematical training has cured me of that.

I like Miss Ritchie very much indeed. I have seen a great deal of her lately. She is so simple and gentle, and childlike, in fact she is a perfect baby in some things, and yet she has read so much and knows so many nice people, and is so interested in everything – not merely in classics, but in the questions of the day, and political economy, and almost everything you can speak of.

I must begin work now, so Goodbye, love to all.

M. de G. Verrall (Merrifield, 1875). Extracts from letters home



KING'S COMES ROUND

*19 February 1878*

Hurrah for womens rights!!! – We have another triumph – Now you know the people of Christs College have allowed Natural Science students to attend the lectures for the men but Miss Clough must go too, that is one of the conditions. Well Mr Oscar Browning has been lecturing on History to about 4 of our girls & also giving the same lectures to the men of Kings – so he asked the Provost if the girls might attend the men's lectures to save his time – The Provost called a college meeting & the result is that Kings has opened its arms to the females – They went yesterday for the first time & Miss Clough went just to the first but is not to go in future. They were met on Kings Bridge you know where Mary [the writer's elder sister] – by an undergrad – he directed them where to go then another met them & took them to a third – The third took them into the hall where they were put into lovely leather chairs – with a lovely table pens & ink & there they were 4 of them & Miss C. – surrounded by about 50 men. It is jolly to think of Kings

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coming round the richest college in Cambridge & once one of the most inveterate enemies of the 'forward minxes'.\* And to think of the undergrads receiving them so cordially within their sacred precincts.

Tonight there is to be a grand affair at Girton a dance & heaps of undergrads are going. I do want to go – I am now going to help Miss Bettany to dress. A blue cashmere princess, snowdrops etc – she will look jolly. A little Miss Gell is going & will have necklace & bracelets of snowdrops. She has such a merry little sparkling laugh – I do want to go – Bohoo!!!

Last night we danced in the dining room – Lancers with 8 couples – Schottische – Waltz etc – It was jolly –

Now I am afraid you do not believe in the difficulty of our Geological lectures – I will therefore quote a sentence or two to show you. 'Therefore it is perfectly clear that local catastrophic action is not inconsistent with continuity of causation.' Also that the 'strike of beds is at right angles to the dip in the plane of the bedding' etc. etc. etc. etc.

P.S. The excitement tonight was immense. Miss Bettany wore a very pale blue cashmere trimmed with silk, a fan, gold bracelet, snowdrops & heath in head & dress –

Miss Gell who is about 5 feet nothing wore a white lama with snowdrops in a chain all round the square body & on the elbow sleeve & fan & in her hair. She looked a regular little doll – I wished I were a man to dance with her. She takes *ones* in black shoes & stockings – & black gloves 6". She did look lovely – Miss Prideaux a *long narrer* lady wore a dark green velvet dress – Miss Harrison white silk & gold beads on neck wrists & head. She is very graceful. Miss Richmond wore pink silk with white crocuses – Miss Clough wore grey slate silk so pretty – They are expected home at 12. It is now 11 so goodnight.

D. Ll. G. Jones (Davies, 1877). Extracts from a letter to her family

\* Professor Adam Sedgwick had called the girls seeking admission to the Higher Local Examination 'forward minxes'.



AN INCONSPICUOUS STUDENT

In January 1879 I came to Newnham in mingled joy and terror. For two terms I was in lodgings and worked for my Group A. Miss Marion Kennedy had charge of the out-students, and she had placed me in Grantchester Street with a Mrs Steinhilper, the widow of a recent teacher