

## CHAPTER I

## THE DAUGHTERS' NEED

NO account of girls' education, however limited its scope, can neglect the fifth chapter of *Education in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Dr R. D. Roberts for the publishers of the present volume. The papers contained in that history were read in August, 1900, at the Summer Meeting of the Cambridge University Extension Society, and Miss F. Gadesden, Headmistress of our Blackheath School from 1886 till 1919, contributed the lecture on "The Education of Girls." She was fortunate in finding ready to hand, in a recent issue of the *Modern Language Quarterly*, the authentic diary of a schoolgirl, who had been at school in Yorkshire under the redoubtable Miss Richmal Mangnall (1769–1820), and the contrast between Miss Mangnall and Miss Gadesden, as heads of girls' schools, is hardly less striking in real life than that between the boys' headmasters in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. This diary, which was kept by Elizabeth Firth, later a friend of the Brontë family, and godmother to Anne and Emily, is delicious in its inclusions and omissions. "Our class of geography were two hours looking for the Emperor of Persia's name. My governess told us it was Mahomet," runs one of the entries. But if they were weak on the names of Persian Emperors, "I got the names of the Kings of England," runs another, and "began of reading ancient history," runs a third. A "brain-day" was the description of a day when a *viva voce* examination was held, no doubt on the lines of the famous *Questions*: "We had a brain-day

## 2 THE DAUGHTERS' NEED CH.

in Geography; I had seven mistakes, which was the least of any one." (Perhaps she had remembered that Mahomet was King of Persia.) But Miss Firth was as good at deportment as at geography: "Miss Fayrer gave 270 words of dictionary for poking; I had ten." The punishment seldom fitted the crime: "Miss Ropers were sent to Coventry till they would say their Catechism. Some of the ladies"—they were never girls—"had the Epistle and Gospels, twenty-eight verses, for writing on their desks." And there was a lot of "whipping" (with one *p*), though it did not teach Miss Firth how to spell "ippertinance."

"Of the moral tone among the 'ladies,'" writes Miss Gadsden, "and the absence of training in honour and unselfishness and public spirit the diary is significant. . . . Brilliant exceptions there doubtless were, but is it any wonder that the majority of girls brought up in such a moral atmosphere should have gone back to their homes selfish, prejudiced and helpless, with no object beyond their own pleasures, and no appreciation or understanding of their duties, and of obligations to themselves and others? This is a type of a school which provided for the rich daughters of England. For the poorer there was no provision at all."

How the few "brilliant exceptions" attempted in the next generation to change the rule for "the majority of girls"; how their work was spread in extension to the "poorer" more directly than to the rich, and in intension to departments of life which had suggested no questions to Miss Mangnall; how the "ladies" were turned back to girls, and were then turned into public schoolgirls; and how Miss Mangnall herself, with her catechism and birch-rod, was replaced by the great and gracious teachers whose acquaintance it will be our privilege to make: this, briefly, is the subject of our jubilee memoir of the Girls' Public Day School Trust,

## I THE DAUGHTERS' NEED 3

founded in time in 1872, but founded securely in spirit on women's capacity and worth.

The perception that *better* schools were wanted was a matter of slow growth, all the slower, no doubt, because of the existence of the worse schools. Mr Sidney Webb has somewhere pointed out that England, unlike some other countries, has derived its education in the main from a species of philanthropy. The ragged-school was the father of the Board School. Little English children were first taught the rudiments of humane learning, by Act of Parliament and at the public expense, not because learning was desirable, nor because Pierian pioneers had discovered that "knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed" (the motto selected for the schools of the Girls' Public Day School Company), but because compulsory schooling seemed, on the whole, the best way of rescuing the children from the gutter. State education, historically, was not an end in itself, but a means to social reform. It was an experiment in philanthropy, not culture, and lawyers still refer to the still famous case of *Regina v. Cockerton* in order to prove that public money voted for purposes of education is intended rather to save children from worse than to prepare them for better things.

Our girls' public schools, on the contrary, owed their rise to no other cause than the need of better schools for girls. And the need of them had to be proved—always a difficult matter—in the face of vested interests in existing schools. Even if they had not arisen, or had not arisen at that time, not one little middle-class girl would therefore have been educationally derelict. The only result would have been that another generation of partially incomplete English womanhood would have grown to maturity in the era of light and expansion in which the nineteenth century closed. No: the children

## 4 THE DAUGHTERS' NEED CH.

who entered our schools were not in danger of any actual harm; they were only missing a potential good. They were receiving a kind of education—enough to shelter them from evil, and to persuade them to stay within their shelter; they were not receiving the kind of education best suited to their capacities and powers. The pious founders of the High Schools, unlike the early State educators, were not planting in the desert. They had to pull down before they could build up. They had to substitute efficiency, system, scholarship, regular hours, a logical curriculum, and careful team-work, for the unmethodized habits of an untrained governess in the schoolroom. All honour, then, to the pioneers, and, particularly, to the pioneers from the schoolroom—Miss Pipe of Laleham, Miss Lowman of Chelsea, Miss Buss and Miss Beale; the Governesses' Benevolent Institution and the London Association of Schoolmistresses,—who laboured on in those early days, and who were fighting ideas as well as words. For behind their resolve to convert the “young ladies” “select establishments” into girls' schools *tout court*, lay the resolve to reform the methods and to evoke recognition for their own ideals.

Evidence to the strength of the daughters' need may be sought from many sources: most scientifically, perhaps, from the *Report* of the Royal Commission on the Education of Girls, which was appointed in 1867, or from the Appendix (of horrible examples) to a paper on the Education of Women, read, in connection with that *Report*, at a meeting of the Society of Arts, on May 31st, 1871, by (Maria Shirreff) Mrs William Grey, to whose pioneer labours this narrative will return. Briefly, the facts are familiar, and hardly require recapitulation. The governess in private families, whose position, “as a rule, was unenviable,” in the moderate language of Mr Traill in *Social England*, and the measure

## I THE DAUGHTERS' NEED 5

of whose unenviability is preserved in many vivid novels, from *Jane Eyre* downwards; the “elegant abridgements” (by the same authority), which formed her library of books, and which survive to-day as by-words of inefficiency; the false standards of social propriety: “it was considered discreditable,” says one historian, “that a lady should subject herself to what little of mental discipline may be derived from cooking or making caps”; the whole preparation for complete womanhood, which consisted, *teste* Mr Traill again, in “a steady application to vocal and instrumental music and to the subject of ladylike manners and deportment,”—various proofs might be adduced to the truth of these summary judgments.

We prefer, however, if we may, in a sphere where so much more was owed to unmarried than to married women, to risk the easy ridicule of nieces and nephews, and to cite the half-forgotten “maiden Aunt” of Tennyson’s neglected *Princess*. She was a lady, it may be recalled from the prologue (she only receives “a showery glance” in the epilogue), who probably saw a great deal more than she said, and the little that she said was marked by insight and precision. *The Princess*, let us note at the outset, was published in 1847, a year or two (this is important) before the foundation of Queen’s and Bedford Colleges, and within a generation of Miss Mangnall’s early death; and in the *Quarterly Review* of April, 1869, it was historically described as “the most solid barrier which English wit had erected against the encroachments of the *femme savante*.” But the reviewer was reckoning without the aunt. “England,” he declared, “is not prepared for either female suffrage or a female Parliament, for women as Poor-Law guardians, attendants at vestries, public lecturers, public speakers, doctors, lawyers, clergy,” and so forth. It may be: England’s unpreparedness has often been the measure

## 6 THE DAUGHTERS' NEED CH.

of her success in overtaking it; and the *Quarterly* reviewer of 1869 may have lived (let us hope he did) to see the Reform Act of 1918. So we come back to the “most solid barrier,” and to the “maiden Aunt” who helped to break it down.

It will be remembered that “we were seven” at Vivian Place, on that summer’s day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Sir Walter Vivian opened his grounds to “his tenants, wife and child,” and “half the neighbouring borough with their Institute, of which he was the patron.” One of the seven was the narrator, a college friend of the younger Walter, the host’s son, and, earlier that day, he had been diving “in a hoard of tales which dealt with knights.” Among those tales was one of a “miracle of noble womanhood,” whose “gallant glorious chronicle” he took with him, his finger in the book, when young Walter called him to the park, to join Aunt Elizabeth, sister Lilia, and the rest. “The patient leaders of the Institute” had to take their turn with the others: “Sport went hand in hand with Science; otherwhere pure sport”; but, on the whole, “strange was the sight and smacking of the time”—the time, as we remarked just now, of the foundation of Queen’s and Bedford Colleges. Aunt Elizabeth, we suspect, had sent a donation to Frederick Denison Maurice, for, while the lads told of undergraduate exploits, and of their “tutor, rough to common men, but honeying at the whisper of a lord,”

the maiden Aunt

Took this fair day for text, and from it preach’d  
An universal culture for the crowd,  
And all things great.

She would have made England a land fit for heroines to live in, and this talk of colleges and crowds “brought,”

## I THE DAUGHTERS' NEED 7

says the narrator, “my book to mind.” He read out the tale of the dame of chivalry, so much praising her nobleness that Sir Walter, patting Lilia’s head, asked, “Where lives there such a woman now?” Sister Lilia, despite the caress, was quick, we remember, to that challenge. “There are thousands now such women,” she declaimed,

but convention beats them down:

It is but bringing up: no more than that:

You men have done it: how I hate you all!

Lilia’s facts were correct to some extent, whether she was talking of colleges or schools, for the future Schools Inquiry Commission, over which Lord Taunton was to preside, did discover that certain educational endowments had been wrongfully diverted from girls to boys, and the Women’s Educational Union, founded in 1871, partly in consequence of that Commission’s *Report*, and subsequently merged in the Girls’ Public Day School Company, was gravely concerned to find the means of replacing those lost endowments. But Lilia did wrong to hate the men, and her wish to be a great princess, and “build far off from men a college like a man’s,” was greeted, as we know, with comments of “part banter, part affection.” The banter was ready, of course, in 1847 and for many years to follow. Our *Quarterly* reviewer, in 1869, was pleased to remark, that “the question has advanced beyond the reach of banter”; but here, at Vivian Place, twenty-two years before, Tennyson might reasonably invent the well-worn coin of boys’ laughter at “prudes for proctors, dowagers for deans, And sweet girl graduates in their golden hair.”

Here, however, Aunt Elizabeth spoke up. “Why not a summer’s as a winter’s tale?” she asked, and, if a summer’s tale at all, “a tale for summer as befits the time,”—the time, again, of sport mixed with science,



## 8 THE DAUGHTERS' NEED CH.

and of that converted house in Harley Street. "A little sense of wrong," we are told, "had touch'd her face with colour" as she voiced the demand for

A talk of College and of ladies' rights,  
A feudal Knight in silken masquerade,—

such talk, for example, though she may not have known it, as an Italian educator, Lionardo Bruni, held in 1405, in behalf of a lady of the Renaissance: "Let religion and morals," he had urged, "hold the first place in the education of a Christian lady," and, secondly, "history, a subject which must not on any account be neglected by one who aspires to true cultivation; for it is our duty to understand the origins of the history and its development, and the achievements of peoples and kings"—not Miss Richmal Mangnall or another. Surely, high among those who felt and interpreted the daughters' need, in the dark age of women's education, we may place Lilia Vivian's maiden Aunt Elizabeth.

Aunt Elizabeth, whom we mention for the last time, had not merely to encounter the affectionate raillery of her male relatives; she was also to find, very soon, that many cultivated women, fully as conscious as she of the demand for women's education, were apprehensive of the innovations. Their objections were based on several grounds. In the last resort, they were attached to the *status quo*: the governesses, after all, were not so bad; it might be difficult to run the house without one; the pupils were certainly learning social manners and elegant deportment; and, since there was a piano in the schoolroom (and musical instruments at that epoch were cheap), why not teach the girls to perform on it? Rather higher in the scale of argument came the reasoned doubt as to the superior advantages of High Schools. Were they not likely to turn out a generation of



## I THE DAUGHTERS' NEED 9

girls made to pattern, and, haply, to the pattern of boys? Chemistry, mathematics and the humanities might prove perilous, defeminizing studies. These female candidates for graduation, bemused and probably bespectacled, would be fit for nothing but to compete with men on terms naturally unequal. And, at the top of the objections, came the *argumentum ad hominem*, or the question of what a man wants. A young lady's business was matrimony; would it advance her prospects in that always overcrowded market to introduce so violent a change into the course of her preparation for it? "We bring up our daughters to be wives," cried the opponents or critics of the public schoolgirl, and the Victorian matron was sufficient in her self-esteem. We may leave it to Mr Lytton Strachey, and to other Victorian idol-breakers, to reveal the fallacies of that great age; but Mrs Grey, in her 1871 paper at the Society of Arts, to which reference was made above, said the first word and the last word in reply to that particular argument. "They are not educated to be wives, but to get husbands," she announced, and her dictum, though unpalatable, was true; so true, that an education for complete womanhood, including wifehood and motherhood, should they ensue, has been gradually replacing, during the past half-century, the imperfect instruction in certain limited accomplishments fit for women which was all that was left at that time—once more, the time of Queen's College—of the gracious Renaissance ideal<sup>1</sup>.

And what was it that Mrs Grey asked for? We shall come in the next chapter to the more precise aspects of her work: to what she did, and tried to do, in conjunction with other women of her time and type. Here,

<sup>1</sup> Another stage of this gradual process, which is not to be condemned merely because it was not born full-grown, is marked by the Board of Education Report on Curricula, 1923.

## 10 THE DAUGHTERS' NEED CH.

however, it is appropriate to note the main lines of her projected reforms, and to observe how conservative they were, in the true sense of that term, how conscientiously they were directed to the expression and fulfilment of women's powers, and how they were founded, historically, on past records of women's achievements. British womanhood, after all—Mr Lytton Strachey would insinuate this more ironically—was not always mid-Victorian in its outlook. The tradition of British public life included Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne, Lady Jane Grey and Queen Mary of Scotland. Fanny Price at Portsmouth, in *Mansfield Park*, seemed to ask for the High School, which was founded for her descendants by the Girls' Public Day School Company in February, 1882; but *Mansfield Park* was written by a woman, and English fiction, from Sir Philip Sidney to George Meredith, has been truer to the type of the open-air heroine than to that of the *femme larmoyante*, or the *Gretchen* of German sensibility. The restricted conception of women's duties, so fashionable in the middle of last century, was not really native to this country, and our reformers of fifty or sixty years ago were reactionaries rather than revolutionaries: repairers of an educational breach, and restorers of social paths to dwell in.

True, Mrs William Grey was a candidate for election to the new School Board for London, in November, 1870. She published three addresses to the electors in the Borough of Chelsea, and each of them was opened, by herself and her chairman, with an apology for her sex. Then, too, she read that paper to the Society of Arts in May, 1871, and she spoke at a public meeting—a veritable landmark in the history of this movement—at the Albert Hall, in May, 1872. Unfeminine? It would seem so, from her own references to these acts,