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AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

CLOSE OF THE ANNUAL EXAMINATION

OF THE

YOUNG LADIES' INSTITUTE,

PITTSFIELD, MASS.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1844.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

OF ALBANY.

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A D D R E S S .

It has happened, I doubt not, to almost every one, who has been led by his vocation, frequently to address public assemblies, that now and then there has occurred an occasion, which was in itself so eloquent, that he has felt embarrassed by the apprehension that it might be belittled by any thing he could say. I confess to you that I have much of this feeling in appearing before you this afternoon. There is a charm in female loveliness, especially in the grace and beauty of the female mind, that will make itself felt, where the voice of man, uttering even its loftiest sentiments, will seem tame and powerless. However, when I consented to undertake this service, I knew the disadvantage under which I should speak ; and it ill becomes me now to

advert to it in the way of apology. My business is, to endeavour to turn the brief period allotted to this exercise to as good account as I can; and though the occasion shuts me up to a somewhat hackneyed topic—female education,—it is a topic in relation to which you are in no danger of hearing, or thinking, or doing, too much. I need not say that your high appreciation of this subject is understood abroad as well as at home—this occasion itself would supersede the necessity of all other evidence of it; but this very circumstance conveys to me an assurance that you will listen patiently to my remarks, even though they should be a mere repetition of that which previous repetition has rendered familiar to you. My object will be to illustrate very briefly the importance of an elevated standard of female education to the great cause of human happiness.

To sketch even an outline of a complete system of female education, would exceed the limits of the present address—much more of the portion of it which can be given to that particular topic. There are, however, two characteristics absolutely essential to a perfect

system, upon which I propose for a moment to dwell.

In the first place, such a system must include the due culture of all the faculties.

Woman, like man, is a compound being, and is gifted with faculties of various kinds—each designed by her Creator to answer some important end. To suppose that she possesses any faculties which may not be turned to profitable account, either in elevating her character, or increasing her usefulness, or both, were a reflection upon the Creator's wisdom: it were to attribute to Him a waste of omnipotent energy, in giving existence to that which, to say the least, might just as well not have existed at all. But if her faculties are all given for some important purpose, it is manifest that they are given to be developed and subjected to suitable exercise — otherwise that purpose can never be accomplished. I do not say that a very imperfect development—such as is incident to the most limited advantages of education — may not save her from being a cumberer of the ground — may not even secure to her a good degree of usefulness in some of her relations; but it is impossi-

ble that any thing short of that general culture which secures the right development of *all* the faculties, should render her what she is capable of being — what Heaven designed that she should be, in *all* her relations. She is constituted with the elements of a noble being; but the moulding of these elements is committed partly to herself, and partly to those under whose guidance and instruction Providence places her.

Time has been when it might have been needful, in speaking on the subject of female education, to vindicate the claims of woman to a course of intellectual discipline; to reason gravely with parents, with a view to convince them that the capabilities of their daughters do not lie chiefly in their fingers. Happily, we have fallen upon a brighter period; and you, young ladies, however it may have fared with your mothers, or even some of your older sisters — *you* are witnesses that female education at this day is something more than the training of the hands or the feet; — that it puts in requisition the head — aye, and sometimes makes the head ache, from delving away at some abstruse problem, or from lin-

gering long in the region of lines and angles. But while the spirit of the age in relation to this subject saves me from the necessity of dwelling upon it, inasmuch as it is now universally conceded that the female *mind* is to be educated, it may not be amiss to suggest that that system is the most perfect, which provides for a complete and harmonious intellectual development. So differently are different minds constituted,—possessing originally the various faculties in different degrees of strength,—that it often becomes an exceedingly difficult matter to direct the early training in such a way as to secure the best result—in other words, so as to subject each of the faculties to a high degree of culture, and at the same time preserve a suitable balance among them all. And this difficulty is increased by the fact that there are usually many minds associated under the same general course of training; and *that* might be imperatively required by one, which would be of little or no importance to another. Hence it is a matter of great moment, that a teacher should be discriminating in his instructions; and that, while they are, as they necessarily must be, to a great extent, of a general

character, they should also have respect, so far as possible, to the actual diversity of intellect that exists among his pupils. Let it be his aim, and let it be their aim, to secure to them the greatest amount of intellectual culture and vigor of which they are susceptible. If they are constitutionally deficient in respect to any faculty, let that deficiency be made up by extraordinary care and diligence. Or, if they possess any faculty in uncommon strength, let them make the most of it they can in consistency with that attention to the other faculties, which is essential to a well balanced mind. That female whose intellectual training has been rightly conducted, and who has diligently improved the advantages she has enjoyed, is prepared to enter the world not only with a mind richly stored with useful knowledge, but with a mind capable of commanding its own powers, and may I not add—*incapable* of being satisfied with present attainments.

But woman has a moral as well as intellectual nature; and to neglect the former were even more dangerous — more criminal, than to neglect the latter. With this part of the

education of young females, parents are especially entrusted; but it is also a matter in relation to which teachers have much to do; while it is hardly necessary to add, that a large part of the responsibility rests upon themselves. As you would render your intellectual acquisitions, young ladies, of any real account, you must join with them the whole assemblage of the moral virtues: you must exhibit the graces of the understanding and the virtues of the heart, growing upon the same stock. Especially, you must cultivate a benevolent disposition — that pure and expansive spirit of good will, that even delights to make sacrifices for the benefit of others. Need I say that this spirit is the product of Christianity, and nothing else; and hence, in order to possess the true moral virtues, you must yield yourselves to the renovating influence of the gospel. Christianity, divine Christianity, is the breath from Heaven, that will communicate to your minds a quickening impulse and a celestial tendency.

If the time would permit, I might speak to you at length of the danger of divorcing¹ the intellectual from the moral in female charac-

ter; or of cultivating the former at the expense, and to the neglect, of the latter. No more striking example of this occurs to me at this moment than the gifted Madam De Staël. Such was the original vigor of her mind, and such the culture to which it had been subjected, that she gained an influence not only in the literary but the political world, to which few of her contemporaries, of either sex, ever attained. She feared not Napoleon so much as Napoleon feared her. What she uttered or wrote was matter to be pondered by the kings and princes of the earth. Even now, she lives in her productions as one of the brightest stars in the world of letters. But it is an intellectual glory that surrounds her name, and nothing else. Though never, so far as I know, the advocate of infidel doctrines, she evinced in her ordinary deportment no practical reverence for Christianity: she absolutely cut loose from religion, morality, even decency, and stands, and must forever stand, not so much an example as a beacon to her sex. Shall I mention a character now to illustrate the opposite of this — the union of a cultivated genius and a cultivated heart? It

shall be Madam De Staël's own daughter—the late Dutchess De Broglie. She inherited in no small degree her mother's intellect, and her mind was improved by the best advantages which Europe could furnish; but by a strange, though blessed, inconsistency on the part of her wayward parent, she was committed in her youth to the guidance of an excellent minister of the gospel, and by the blessing of God accompanying his influence, she became, amidst all the worldly splendour which surrounded her, an exemplary professor of Christianity. And her life was an untiring course of benevolent action. She moved about like an angel of mercy, amidst scenes of want and sorrow. She had an ear that was quick to catch the faintest sigh from the desolate or smitten heart. The influence which talents and station secured to her, she consecrated with most scrupulous fidelity to the service of God and the benefit of her race. As she was no stranger in the royal palace, she diffused the savour of her piety even there; and the King's daughters were not ashamed to own her as a model. Death has removed her to a higher sphere, but there are many who still

walk in the light of her example, and are refreshed by the remembrance of her virtues. Is the character of the mother or the daughter, think you, now the object of the greater veneration? Does not the comparison abundantly evince that genius without virtue, gives, after a little, but a dim and sickly light; that genius combined with virtue shines, despite even of the grave, with an inextinguishable radiance.

I have adverted to the nobler parts of woman's nature — viz., the intellectual and moral; but she has another set of faculties still, which, though of an humbler character, can by no means be safely neglected — I mean the physical faculties — every thing connected with her corporeal constitution. I need not say that a proper attention to this is essential to bodily health; and that it would prevent no inconsiderable degree of the whole amount of human suffering. Sickness and pain are the penalty for a violation of the laws of our physical nature; and the penalty follows the offence by an unchangeable ordinance of Heaven. Besides, as the body is the servant of the soul, or in other words, the organ of its operations, it is manifest that the penalty

of this neglect reaches farther than to the body—it takes effect also upon the mind—in repressing its energies, and diminishing its power of action, and even quenching the fire of its native aspirations. It is wonderful to observe to what extent the history of genius is the history of premature deaths; and how large a portion of them have evidently been occasioned by a disregard to those laws which the Creator has incorporated with our physical existence.

It cannot be denied that young females, during the course of their education, are exposed to some peculiar temptations to this species of neglect which I am considering. In their eagerness to improve to the utmost their opportunities for intellectual culture, they often make war upon their physical constitution: in their concern to treasure the jewel, they seem ready to throw away the casket. Especially are they in danger of neglecting bodily exercise, and some ambitious spirits will even suffer their studies to entrench upon the proper hours for sleep; little imagining that this process, while it gradually undermines the constitution, is always immediately

followed by a corresponding lassitude and diminution of mental vigor. If I mistake not, young ladies are much more exposed to this evil than youth of the other sex; for the latter have greater facilities for almost every kind of exercise, unless indeed it be that of their tongues, than the former; and the customs of society would seem to allow a much wider range to the one than to the other. And the danger is often rendered the greater by the fact that they are separated from their parents or natural guardians, who might be expected to feel the deepest interest for them in this respect as in every other; though this difficulty may be, and doubtless in very many cases is, entirely obviated by the vigilant and faithful attentions of their teachers. But let teachers do their best, and let parents do their best, and it will all be to little purpose, unless the young lady herself will be true to her own interests — unless she will pay due respect to the laws of her physical nature. It is of great importance, in order to guard against this evil, that she have her fixed hours of exercise and of rest, as well as of study; and consider herself pledged to the former as sacredly as to the

latter. It would be impossible for me, young ladies, to do justice to this subject in a lengthened address—much less in a passing remark; but so deeply am I impressed with its importance, as connected not only with your bodily health, but your mental and moral improvement, that I should not be true either to my duty or your interests, if I should not urge it upon you as a matter of paramount concern. I could tell you of young females, who, for their culpable neglect of themselves during the period of their education, have ever since been labouring under some painful—perhaps some incurable—malady. I could point you to some fine specimens of female genius, which, for this same reason, are burning with diminished splendour, and seem likely soon to be quenched in the night of death. Aye, and I could conduct you to many a grave, where, if the whole truth had been told upon the monument, you would have read, not merely that a promising young female was entombed there, but that the malady of which she died had its origin in self-neglect, while her physical faculties were in the process of development. These facts, young ladies, are of moni

tory import; and I advert to them, not as indicating dangers against which you may not easily guard, but dangers which are really of a threatening character, when they are met in any other spirit than that of the most careful vigilance. Let me say then, you owe it to yourselves, you owe it to your parents, you owe it to society, you owe it to Heaven, that you give due heed to the cultivation of your physical nature.

There is one important branch of education that can hardly be said to relate exclusively to either set of faculties of which I have spoken, — but has more or less to do with all of them — I mean the cultivation of the manners. The importance of this may most easily be judged of by a comparison of two young females, the one of cultivated, the other of uncultivated, manners. Admit, if you please, that they are upon a level in respect to intellectual endowments and acquirements, — yet what a difference will the mere circumstance of manners make, in their facilities of usefulness and in the estimate that will be formed of them! The one will find easy access to an intelligent and polished circle —

the other, at the moment of her introduction, produces the impression that she is out of her element, and perhaps, that her presence might just as well as not be dispensed with. The one may probably be treated with marked attention—the other, possibly, with more than apparent neglect. The one will find friends every where—the other will move about the world as a stranger. The one may chance to pass for even more than she is worth—the other will almost certainly pass for less. This, then, is a matter to which great attention should be paid; and it becomes a question of no small interest, in what way the desired object is to be gained.

I would say then, that good manners have their foundation in good dispositions—they are simply the acting out of a benevolent temper, under the guidance of discretion and good taste. There is a charm in the expression of simple benevolence, which goes irresistably to the heart; and which, especially when accompanied with intelligence, can scarcely fail to render its possessor an attractive object. But it is essential to the perfection of good manners, that there should be that simple and

graceful acting out of the feelings which is the opposite of all awkwardness, and especially of all affectation. Nothing must be done merely for effect—nothing in the spirit of an ostentatious vanity. It would be well for young ladies who may be tempted to take airs with a view to increase their personal attractions, to reflect that all such attempts are sure to recoil on the individuals who make them; for the miserable vanity which prompts to them, is not concealed even by a veil of gauze. I hardly need add, that it is important to be acquainted with the forms of society, in order to mingle in it with freedom or comfort; and this of course can be the result of nothing but experience; but if you give heed to this only, and neglect the cultivation of benevolent dispositions, you have a superstructure without a foundation—if you have agreeable manners, you have them at the expense of playing the hypocrite.

What I have said may suffice to show that the true system of female education must include the culture of all the powers—intellectual, moral and physical; but the other thought which I proposed to bring out is, that

this culture should be directed with reference to the sphere to which woman is destined.

If I lived on the other side of the ocean, and were addressing an audience in Her Majesty's dominions, I might possibly be restrained, either by loyalty or delicacy, from saying that I do not regard the world of politics as exactly the sphere for lovely woman; but as I am out of the Queen's jurisdiction as well as out of her hearing, and as I expect never to be the subject either of a king or a queen, I will venture to say, with all my admiration of the grace and dignity with which the British throne is now occupied, that to my republican eye, a throne seems, after all, scarcely a fitting place for a young female—that her hand looks to me too delicate to wield the engine of national power; that her voice is too sweet to be used in giving out words of command to those who command armies; that her ear is too exquisitely attuned to be shocked by the din of national conflict or the convulsions incident to political ambition. But I am far from saying that we must look abroad to find woman out of her place; for it has come to pass, in these latter years, that

we have women at home who make a desperate effort to climb up where they may be seen; who flatter themselves that they have a mission to harangue the multitude; and, with this impression, sail about the world to do men's work, under the banner of an imaginary philanthropy. If there are any here, who like this feature of the times, I am sure I shall not stop to dispute them—non disputandum de gustibus—but I cannot forbear saying for myself, that I eschew it with most unaffected cordiality; and it would scarcely cost me more pain to know that my daughter was shut up for life in a nunnery, than that she was going up and down the world on the offensive errand of haranguing promiscuous assemblies. But do you ask me, where the province of woman actually lies? I answer, first of all, her province is in the family—where she may find channels for her benevolent and holy influence, in the tenderest relations of life. Her province is in circles of social intelligence and refinement, where talents, and accomplishments, and cheerful and kind affections, can always find play. Her province is in the walks of philanthropy,

where she can go, angel-like, to supply the wants of the needy, or to soften the couch of the dying. And if she is capable of such service, she is not out of her element, when she takes her pen to send out into the world lessons of truth and virtue: in this way she may, with perfect decorum, make her voice heard and her good influence felt, to the ends of the earth. And if such be her province, let her be educated with reference to it. Let it be impressed upon her early what she has to do, and let the end of her education be to qualify her to do it. The time does not permit me to show wherein the education of the sexes should differ in consideration of their different destinations; but this may be safely left to the just and discriminating judgment of those to whom their education is entrusted.

I have endeavoured thus far to show you what constitutes an elevated standard of female education. Let me now very briefly illustrate the influence which this is fitted to exert upon the great cause of human happiness.

And the first thought which here obviously suggests itself is, that, as a general rule, near-

ly half of every community is composed of females; and as it will universally be admitted that intelligence and virtue are favourable to the happiness of the individuals who are the subjects of them, so it must also be admitted that that system of education that *forms* to intelligence and virtue, contributes to elevate the character and improve the condition of its subjects. Let the female portion then of any community, or if you please of the whole world, be rightly educated—let their faculties be so developed and trained as to secure permanently their legitimate and healthful exercise, — and provision is made at once for the elevation and happiness of nearly half of the race; and thus a mighty step is taken toward the universal renovation of human society.

But it is the *indirect* influence to which I would chiefly direct your attention — I mean the influence which highly cultivated females exert upon our own sex — in purifying the fountains of social enjoyment, and in elevating the general standard of intellectual and moral character.

I shall surely neither let out any secret, or

make any humbling acknowledgment, in saying that nature, or rather the God of nature, has given to woman a mysterious dominion over the heart of man; has furnished her with some silken invisible chord by which she can often, in her weakness, bind the man of might, and lay him not only a willing, but most delighted, captive at her feet. Suppose then that, superadded to this, there be the charm of a highly cultivated intellect, of sensibilities refined and elevated by the influences of Christianity, of manners in which the grace of the intellectual and the grace of the moral, are beautifully commingled — who can estimate the influence which a young female, possessing such attractions, must almost necessarily exert upon those of the other sex with whom she associates? Her intelligence will improve their minds; her gracefulness will improve their manners; her unaffected and generous sensibility will quicken them to a higher sense of the right, and to nobler impulses of humane and virtuous feeling; and her reverence for God and her devotion to his service, will be like a still but yet mighty voice calling them towards the path that leads to

Heaven. I am willing this matter should be tested by experience. If you can find that community where there is the greatest amount of female cultivation, both intellectual and moral, then I venture to say you will have found that, where the youth of our sex are growing up with most that is exemplary and attractive, both in their sentiments and manners.

But in ordinary cases, the young female, such as I am describing, is, at no distant period, transferred to other and yet more important spheres of action. She becomes the head of a family—has new interests to consult, and new cares devolving upon her; but still she meets nothing for which her previous education has not amply prepared her. Her influence as a wife—unless she happens to be cursed with a husband that has not a mind to estimate her qualities, or a heart to feel her power—is as benign as it is efficient. She quickens his intellect by her intelligent conversation. She assists him in forming useful and benevolent plans. She meets him as a good angel, to encourage him amidst difficulties, to cheer him in sorrow, to strengthen him

in weakness, to co-operate with him, silently it may be, but most effectually, for the benefit of his fellow men. In short, though she keeps at home, and never stands forth in an obtrusive attitude, her voice is heard in his words, her hand is felt in his movements—I had almost said, her very heart beats in his pulsations. View her also in the character of a mother—surrounded with an immortal charge—entrusted with the first direction of minds that are to survive the material universe, and to exist forever in joy or wo, according to the character which is formed here. She watches the first opening of the faculties, as the signal for commencing her course of instruction. She remembers that the earliest intellectual and moral exercises look toward the formation of habits; and that the habits ultimately decide the character; and that every wrong impression which the mind receives at that early period, is a seed of evil sown in a most fruitful soil; and hence she labours with untiring zeal to inspire, as early as possible, the love of knowledge, and truth, and wisdom—in other words, to train all the faculties to the office for which the Creator

designed them. And she keeps at this difficult but yet delightful vocation, as her children grow up around her, guarding them from evil and exciting and alluring them to good; and though her efforts may sometimes be counteracted by the influence of temptation upon a naturally unfilial and rebellious spirit, yet in all ordinary cases she may expect to find part of her reward in the well being and the well doing of her children. It is according to the common order of God's providence, that they will grow up with enlightened minds and virtuous habits, and will ere long stand as pillars in society — perhaps pillars in the temple of our God. Suppose such a conjugal and maternal influence as this to be universally diffused through a community, — would you ask for any other pledge that that community would draw towards it the admiring homage of the whole world?

But we have not yet explored the whole field of woman's influence. Though her most important duties no doubt lie in her own family, yet there are many channels of usefulness open to her in the general relations she sustains to society. What a charm does a lady

whose mind is well cultivated and well directed, throw over the social circle. Her presence imparts to it dignity as well as grace; it not only operates as a restraint upon every approach to indecent levity of manners, but frequently also as an encouragement to virtuous aspirations and generous actions. And then how much is she likely to accomplish in the retired walks of charity. Her cultivated intellect enables her to devise the best means for the accomplishment of benevolent objects; her cultivated affections dispose her to employ these means according to her ability; and thus her whole life becomes a course of delightful obedience to the law of kindness. I know there are many females whose names stand high on the record of charity, and will forever stand high on the record of Heaven, whose opportunities for intellectual culture have been but meagre, and whose attainments are proportionably limited: but in these cases, the moral faculties have been trained, possibly self-trained, though the intellectual have been neglected; and even in these, the character would have risen to a loftier elevation, if the intellect as well as the heart had received due culture.

I hardly need add—for indeed I have already adverted to the fact—that it is within the legitimate province of woman to aid in guiding public taste and public morals, and thus forming the character of her age, by means of her pen. She is peculiarly adapted to figure in the more tasteful departments of literature: she has an eye that is quick to discern the beautiful, and her imagination not unfrequently takes a lofty as well as graceful flight, and she pours out thoughts and feelings that will make themselves felt in a glow of admiration, perhaps on the opposite side of the globe. And sometimes too, she shows herself at home in the abstruse and the profound, and brings up from the deep places of science, that which many a lord of creation has not the mind to comprehend. I might make out a list of female writers of the present age—not a small part of which should be American names—who are exerting an influence on the character of their race, greater and better than we can adequately estimate; but I will only point you to that bright sun in the firmament of female intellect and virtue—HANNAH MORE—a sun which, in one sense, has sunk beneath the horizon, and in

another, is shining in full-orbed glory,—or rather, with an ever increasing brilliancy. Her productions, during her life, exerted an influence in the highest as well as the lowest circles; in educating the heir of the throne as well as in diffusing contentment through the cottage. And since she has gone to her rest and her reward, they lift up a voice for truth and virtue every where; and the name of their author will be revered, and her memory cherished, and her influence felt, till literature and patriotism and virtue shall have achieved their final conquests. I admit that the world has yet seen but one Hannah More; but it has seen many who have partaken of her spirit and her virtues; and we trust it may yet see many more, whose works may accomplish as much for their generation, and whose names may descend to posterity as fragrant and bright as hers.

I am willing to hope that I have said enough to show, that the cause of female education is vital to the great cause of human happiness. And now, if I could make myself heard through all the high and low places of my country, I would not leave a single inha-

bited spot unreached by an earnest expostulation to guard the interests of the nation and the age, by elevating the standard of female improvement. I would say to the man who loves his country—educate your daughters, and they will stand the pillars to your institutions—they will, by an indirect influence, check that spirit of insubordination and licentiousness, which threatens to rob us of treasure that was purchased by our fathers' blood. I would say especially to the demagogue, who stands up in the Capitol, and wastes the nation's time and money, and spits venom in the nation's face, while yet he hypocritically claims to be the nation's friend—I would say to him, go home and educate your daughters; and perhaps you may thereby, in another generation, heal the wounds with which you have already made your country bleed. I would say to the patron of intelligence and refinement—if it were necessary—educate your daughters, and ignorance and barbarism will take the alarm and fly away from all our borders. I would say to the philanthropist and the Christian—educate your daughters, and the glorious cause which you love—the

cause of truth and charity and piety, will grow and brighten under the influence. Yes, and I would say even to the humblest man in society,—educate your daughters, though it be at the expense of tugging harder at the anvil, or of making a longer day in the field;—for thereby you will elevate your daughters—you will elevate yourselves—and society and Heaven will bless you for it.

But I am admonished that this train of remark may seem to have but little application upon the ground on which I stand; for I see before me the evidence that female education here requires no new advocates. I congratulate you that you have an institution in the midst of you which promises so much, which has accomplished so much, for the elevation of the female character. Let me say that the spot which you occupy, seems to me in delightful keeping with the rich advantages which this institution, with its twin brother for the other sex,* offers; for if the sun shines upon a brighter, lovelier vale than this, I know it not. It is well for you that you are dispos-

* An excellent school for boys under the superintendence of the Rev. Mr. Nash.

ed thus to conform the intellectual and the moral to the external and the natural; so that there shall be a harmony between the voice of the soul and the melodies of the visible creation. I respectfully proffer to the young ladies in whose presence I have spoken, my best wishes for their continued improvement and happiness;— to their teachers, my thanks in behalf of society at large, for their exemplary and successful efforts in the important station they occupy; and to the respected inhabitants of this village, my sincere congratulations that they are doing so much to diffuse the influence of knowledge and virtue. When your children's children shall come back to this hallowed spot a century hence to keep another jubilee, and these skies shall look down on another and yet greater assemblage, and this valley shall once more ring with the shouts of welcome and of praise, may there be a generation of wives, and mothers, and daughters here, to join in the grateful services of that day, who shall be the living monuments of *your* fidelity to the cause of female education.