

Original Communications.

MEDICAL EDUCATION OF WOMEN.

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THE recent occurrences in Philadelphia, by which a medical class in that city have acquired an unenviable notoriety, have brought the subject of the medical education of women more prominently before the community than before. Nothing advances any cause so much as the martyrdom or persecution of its disciples. In this way the Philadelphia medical class have given an unexpected impetus to the cause they opposed. In an address to the graduating medical class of Harvard College, delivered last March, I considered briefly the subject of the medical education of women. In view of the recent occurrences at Philadelphia, these remarks may be of interest to some, who were not in the audience to whom they were addressed. They are presented here as a contribution to the discussion of a subject, which the community will continue to discuss till a satisfactory solution is reached. It is perhaps needless to say that the following views are not given as those of the medical department of Harvard College on this subject. The writer alone is responsible for them. The style of an address to a class is preserved on account of the inconvenience of altering it.

"With regard to another matter, in which you are somewhat personally interested, public opinion is vacillating. I refer to the status of woman in the community. Her claim for admission into the medical profession is only a part of her general claim for admission into every possible avenue of labor. Whatever may be the final decision of this question, it is evident that the light which physiology can throw upon it—the facts which physicians can best supply—will contribute largely to its correct solution.

"I am aware that this is a delicate subject. So much ridicule, sarcasm and false senti-

ment have been thrown about it of late, that it is difficult to speak of the woman question without exciting a smile. But in spite of ridicule, prejudice, sentiment and passion, the question forces itself upon the community. It demands and will have a hearing and an answer. I do not propose to inflict upon you a discussion of woman's sphere. For you may be sure that whatever she can do, she has a right to do, and eventually will do. Everything finds its own place, whether it be a flower or a poem, a race or an individual, a man or a woman. But as in the effort to open for herself a broader way of life, woman just now knocks hardest at the physician's door, it would be alike mean and inexpedient not to give her a courteous hearing and the best answer. Thus can medicine, thus can you and I, aid in the formation of a correct public opinion.

"There are one or two considerations that are important in this connection. The first is that, *a priori*, woman has the same right to every function and opportunity, which our planet offers, that man has. It is idle to talk about this or that being right for man and wrong for woman. Whatever is right for one is right for the other. The real question is not one of right, but of capability or possibility; and this resolves itself into one of organization and development. Just here, comes in the necessity of interrogating physiology. An exact knowledge of woman's organization and possible development, would show both what she can do and what she ought to do. What the possible and coming woman may be, I will not venture to say. This, however, may be safely affirmed, even after giving the fullest credence to Darwin's theory of development, that a woman will never develop into a man, or a man into a woman.

"There is a second consideration, which is a corollary from the preceding one. It is this. If woman has the same right that man has to every sort of knowledge and every sort of work, it follows that she has an equal right with him to the privileges and the responsibilities of the medical profession. This is not only so on *a priori* grounds, but there is nothing in the nature

of Medicine to forbid it. Medicine knows among her votaries no distinction of race, or sex or color. The doors of her temple are open to all worshippers. According to the ancient Pelasgic mythology, Æsculapius was surrounded by a cortege of disciples of both sexes, who dispensed his benefits to mortals. This was the earliest symbol of medicine, and is typical of it. Our modern science is no degenerate child of the ancient God, and with outspread arms welcomes all who can do her bidding.

"I say, can do her bidding, for here lies the real question. The point about which public opinion is to crystallize is not whether woman has the right to study and practise medicine, for she has this so clearly that it is absurd to doubt it; nor whether there is anything in medicine itself, that is improper for woman to know or to deal with, for science—knowledge—may ennoble, it can never degrade man, woman, or angel; the point about which the public is in doubt, and needs enlightenment, is simply whether woman's organization will permit her to undertake the toil of the medical profession and successfully compete with men therein. It is not more true that one star differeth from another star in glory, than that man differeth from woman. The glory of man is one; the glory of woman is another. But difference is not inferiority. The sexes, though different, are joined by equal privileges and equal rights. If woman's organization does not adapt her to the practice of medicine, she will never succeed in it. If the reverse is true, no opposition or prejudice, no law, argument or ridicule will prevent her from successfully engaging in it.

Under these circumstances, the course of wisdom for you and for the medical profession is not to oppose the efforts of women in this direction. Let the experiment of trying female physicians be fairly made. Throw no obstacle in the way of a complete experimental solution of the problem. The underlying principle of your profession is to seek for the demonstration of the truth. In fifty years we shall get the answer. Shall I hazard a conjecture as to the answer? It would be this. Guided by the light of physiology, I have no doubt that women can master the science of medicine, as they have done that of astronomy and mathematics, as successfully as men; but that only in exceptional departments will they become successful medical practitioners.

"The admission of females into our medical schools, under the present organization of the latter, involves not only the question

of the medical education of females, but the propriety of teaching the two sexes, at the same time and in the same room, with the same illustrations, human anatomy, human physiology and human pathology. I do not admit that there is anything demoralizing in these studies to either sex. On the contrary, they are ennobling; but it does not follow because they are so, that it will elevate and purify boys and girls, or men and women to study them together. A bath is a necessary, luxurious and purifying process for all, but it does not follow that it is wise for the two sexes to bathe at the same time and in the same tub. A certain amount of juxta-position of the sexes ennobles both; more than a certain amount degrades both. I will not undertake to argue this point with those who do not instinctively feel and acknowledge its truth. I will only say, that I would not have a son of mine associate with any woman, who *felt* no impropriety about dissecting the human body with him. I hope to live long enough to see, here in Massachusetts, the ballots falling impartially from male and female hands into all our ballot boxes; so shall liberty and justice be made secure forever; but God forbid that I should ever see men and women aiding each other to display with the scalpel the secrets of the reproductive system; or with crucible and microscope investigating the constituents of the urine; or charmingly discussing together the labyrinthine ways of syphilis.

"Do you ask, then, how women are to obtain the education, by which to prove or disprove their ability to practise the art of medicine? The answer is evident:—Those who desire to have the experiment tried must furnish some of our existing medical schools with the means of giving separate medical instruction, or they must build and endow separate schools for women."