

The College Girl of America

By

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of Old New England Roostrees," etc.*

Illustrated



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INSCRIBED
TO THE MEMORY OF
Alice Freeman Palmer
WHO LOVED ALL COLLEGE GIRLS

"Hers was a life in industry and energy marvellous and undaunted, dedicated to large and ever larger uses, and inspired from first to last by the loftiest ideality." — *Richard Watson Gilder.*

Introduction

THE college girl is to-day a force second to none in American life. She it is who will mould the minds, modify the manners, and help raise the moral tone of the men and women of the future. And she will do this not merely through her school-teacher function, — though there, of course, her influence must be tremendous, — not chiefly through the relation of wife and mother, though that, too, is of vast importance, but principally and above all, I believe, through her every-day intercourse with those about her, as the friend of her chosen intimates, the companion of her chance associates, and the comrade of her fellow workers. The kind of influence any college girl exerts is, of course, determined in great measure by the kind of woman that she is. And the kind of woman that she is depends very largely, in these days, upon the social and intellectual atmosphere of the college from which she has been graduated. All these colleges, it may

at once be said, are religious in their conception and tone. People outside the college gates have worried a good deal latterly over this matter, but their anxiety, it would appear, has been quite unnecessary, for the college girl certainly finds religious training of some kind, and usually of a very good kind, in college. But the sort of social and intellectual training she receives depends vastly upon the institution. For that reason it has seemed to me worth while to study with some care here life in the different women's colleges of first rank in this country.

So far as has been possible, — depending as one must upon the latest reports made to the Commissioner of Education (two years back in many cases), — the colleges have all been presented in the order of their present student enrolment, — with the one exception of Simmons College, which has been placed at the end because it does not yet give the degree, as do the others here chosen for representation.

I have taken for granted in this book the value of a college training for girls. If that question has not yet been settled, as I believe it has, it is not the province of this particular work to settle it. Into the debate as to the “unsexing” which may come upon American womanhood as a result of

college life, I have chosen, too, not to enter. The world in general, I think, has come quite sufficiently to the belief of Mr. George Herbert Palmer, professor of philosophy in Harvard University, who put himself on record some time ago to the effect that if a woman cannot stand a college training it speaks pretty badly for her womanly qualities. "I have no use," he said, pithily, "for womanhood that won't wash."

The fact of the matter is that college, far from hurting girls, helps them more than people in general have any means of knowing. Old President Quincy of Harvard once declared that a man got a good deal out of college if he just rubbed his shoulders against the college building. A woman may be said to get a good deal out of college even if she never gets further than the entrance examinations. For during those few hours, at least, she has had the advantage of standing shoulder to shoulder with representative young women of all localities, bound together by a common interest, and bent upon a common intellectual end. As to the girl who has really entered college and lived its varied life, all that she gets from her associates could not be written in many books the size of this one. From the Southern girl, beside whom she trains in the gymnasium, she acquires without

knowing it a hint of the angle of vision peculiar to that part of our country; from the Westerner, who sings next her in the Glee Club, she learns what a small thing it is to judge people by their family, instead of by character and attainment; from the millionaire's daughter she discerns the futility of wealth as a covering for vulgarity, and by knowing the ambitious New England girl, whose poverty makes her only more proud, she comes to regard with proper reverence those families of austere life and lofty thinking who have been poor country ministers for generations, perhaps. In adjusting herself to so many types, she grows, perforce, democratic; and it is the most important thing, of all important things, in this, our country, that women should be democratic.

Again, the college woman is especially valuable to the world as an exponent of culture. The future of American culture depends on the women. They alone have the leisure for it. And upon the college woman who has been laying up stores of intellectual wealth rests the duty of redeeming the over-commercial tone Americans are in danger of acquiring. The value of the discipline of college, too, is a thing which should not be ignored. But more important than anything else — perhaps because up to the present its importance has been largely

overlooked — is the training in poise college may and should give a girl. The daughter of a mechanic frequently becomes in this country the mother of our most distinguished citizen, — not to mention her possible relationship to the English nobility. College, then, should turn her out “fit” for whatever life shall bring.

It is, however, to a figure used by Mr. Hamilton Wright Mabie, in a graduation address which he gave last year, that I must resort to define the particular object of this book. Mr. Mabie spoke of sitting in a sheltered sunny shipyard, watching the men at work upon a great schooner. In that quiet spot there was no suggestion of the ocean that lay not far beyond, only the sunshine and the blue sky and the steady, rhythmic sound of the workmen’s tools. Yet this was a most important period in the ship’s life; every nail that was driven home true would one day help her out there upon the stormy sea to withstand wind and rain. The time would come when every stroke deftly dealt now would tell tremendously for better or for worse. For this was the time of preparation. Because college, too, is a time of preparation, conditions there during the building of the girl are of importance. Different temperaments, different needs, require, of course, different things. It is my hope that this volume

may, in some cases, at least, assist the fitting of the particular temperament to the institution which can best help it to sane, sound womanhood.

It but remains to acknowledge, with gratitude, the kindly help generously given me by friends all over the country; and particularly to express my indebtedness to the publishers of the *Century Magazine*, — by whose gracious permission I have been enabled to reproduce here portions from their “Festivals in Women’s Colleges,” — to the *New England Magazine* for credited extracts, and to the editors of the *Outlook*, for allowing me here to reprint the substance of an article on “New Occupations for Educated Women,” which I contributed to their publication last year.

M. C. C.

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The College Girl of America

SMITH COLLEGE

FEW acts possible to humanity are more noble than to provide for generations to come privileges and rich opportunities for which one has oneself longed all through life in vain. The men who have founded colleges have usually lacked the culture a college course gives, and, from the nature of things, no college-bred woman has yet started an institution for the higher education of girls. But of the women of limited education who have thus served young womanhood, no other has left so plain a record of her own keen sense of what she missed as Sophia Smith, founder of Smith College. To her clergyman, the Rev. John M. Greene, D. D., who had proposed to her that she bequeath her generous fortune to found this woman's college,

she replied, as she accepted his suggestion: "I wish I could have enjoyed the advantages of such a college when I was a girl; it would have made my life far richer and happier than it has been."

Yet Sophia Smith was born and reared under a fortunate star, and had a satisfactory life — as life used to be regarded. Her paternal ancestor in the sixth generation was Lieutenant Samuel Smith, one of the most prominent of the original settlers in Hadley, from whom, it is very interesting to know, Mary Lyon, the founder of Mt. Holyoke Seminary, now Mt. Holyoke College, also traced descent. Hatfield, Miss Smith's lifelong home, was noted for its scholars. That it did not itself become a college town is rather curious, inasmuch as all its ambitions tended in that direction. Back in Colonial days the citizens of the place even went so far as to erect a building which they called "Queen's College," and for which the governor, Sir Francis Bernard, issued a charter in King George's name. But, yielding to the opposition strongly brought to bear upon him, Sir Francis later cancelled his permission — and Hatfield lost its college. Yet when Sophia Smith was born, four years before the birth of the wonderful nineteenth century, the aspiration for a college had by no means died out of the town.

It was not until this woman had reached the age of sixty-five, however, that she really took the first decisive step in the matter concerning which she, and those about her, had so long been earnestly thinking. Her brother Austin had just died, and left her a large sum of money, which she neither wanted nor knew how to use wisely. She had no objects in mind to which she desired to give her fortune, but she knew that her own method of life would never make great inroads upon it, and that a very good sum would, therefore, be available for some use when she should die. All this she confided, on a beautiful May day in 1861, to her pastor, whom she had sought out for advice about the matter of a will. For hours the two talked in the quaint, book-lined parsonage study, and she would not go away until Doctor Greene had promised to help her carefully to the choice of a proper beneficiary.

Accordingly, after several weeks of study and research, the good minister matured two plans for the disposition of Miss Smith's property. The principal item in one was the founding of a woman's college; the chief provision of the other was for a deaf-mute institution. There was then no woman's college in New England, and not many of the leading educators were ready to give young

women educational advantages equal to those provided for young men. Yet, when the two plans were presented to Miss Smith, after very little delay, she decided to accept the one which provided for the college. The idea pleased her. "She had faith in it," Doctor Greene records, "as desirable and feasible."

That she was, however, "but yet a woman" is very plain from what followed. Because the outside discouragement was so great, the will of 1861, when eventually made, provided for the deaf-mute institution instead of for the college. None the less, it would appear that Sophia Smith was Heaven-ordained to start the project toward which her heart yearned. For, six years later, a rich man of Northampton having liberally provided for the deaf mutes, Miss Smith felt quite at liberty to follow her own desires. Accordingly, the will was changed; an able body of trustees was chosen, and, on July 11, 1868, the quiet Hatfield gentlewoman became the founder of what is now the largest girls' college in the country.

From the very first Miss Smith understood that her college would embody four cardinal principles: (1) The educational advantages provided by it would be equal to those afforded young men in their colleges; (2) Biblical study and Christian

religious culture would be given prominence; (3) The cottage system of buildings, or homes for the students, instead of one mammoth central building, would prevail; (4) Men would have a part in the government and instruction in it as well as women, "for it is a misfortune for young women or young men to be educated wholly by their own kind." These four ideas were in Miss Smith's mind, and were clearly expressed in the documents connected with the founding of the college.

Of course a scheme so large and broad as this one was of small growth. At one time the plan even was to have the college in Hatfield, — so long kept waiting for such distinction, — but afterward, at the suggestion of Mr. Greene, Miss Smith's ever-trusted helper in the matter, the site was changed to Northampton. To people generally, no word was dropped concerning the plan. But in Hatfield, as in all small New England towns, curiosity is a master passion, and, during the last years of Miss Smith's life, the most interesting of all questions among the village folk was, "Who will get her money?" A silence like that of the sphinx, however, brooded over the mystery. Occasionally a stranger would come, by stage or carriage, to the old tavern near the Smith home, go to the house for a few hours, and then steal away as silently

as he came, leaving no name behind. The few village folk who saw these visitors said they looked like preachers or lawyers. Nobody thought of them as suitors. For, though Miss Smith was not an unattractive woman, all felt that her strong and reticent life would never be shared by another in marriage.

The life led in Hatfield by this New England gentlewoman has been interestingly sketched for us by one who knew her well.¹ For years Austin Smith and a sister Harriet lived with Sophia in the substantial old home their father had left them. Austin was a shrewd man of business, honest, keen, and upright in his dealings. Harriet was kind and intelligent. Both sisters, however, were economical in their habits, and quiet and reticent, though neighbourly. They gave for charity and for such religious purposes as came within the scope of the Hatfield church, where they were constant attendants, but they never made large gifts or revealed any especial interest in the higher education of women. That was Sophia's secret. The sisters were quite deaf, and this naturally led them to lives of thought and retirement. The village library, not large, but of choice books, offered a wide range of study, by

¹ Giles B. Stebbins in *New England Magazine*.

which means their somewhat limited education was broadened.

“About twice a year, however, the Smith sisters made a party, inviting some fifty of the young and middle-aged. The tall wax candles, the great brass andirons, the bright open fires, the solid mahogany furniture, the silver tea-service, the old china, the fragrant tea, the delicate and perfect home-made biscuit and cake of these occasions all gave the fortunate visitors a gracious glimpse of old-time gentility. Then, once a year, for a long while, the three occupants of the house went to Saratoga for a few weeks. While there they came so near the fashionable world, in equipage and dress, as to say by their acts: ‘We have a good right to be as brave and fine as you are; we can if we choose.’ Thus they had views of life in these aspects, and then dropped back in quiet content to their plain village ways.”

Sophia lived longer than either her brother or her sister, and it was not until she passed away in 1870, at the age of seventy-four, that the secret of her life became known. Her estate, appraised at \$500,000, went almost entirely to the college for which she had designed it, and in September, 1871, the first building acquired by Smith was purchased at a cost of \$26,000, and at the same time a committee was