

THE AMERICAN GIRL WHO STUDIES ABROAD

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IN TWO PAPERS—FIRST PAPER



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OF late years a tendency has been developed among rich mothers to deport the coming American girl to be educated in Europe. Indeed, this custom has taken so firm a root in the general mind that a child who is thus reared is considered to have acquired some peculiar advantage by her trip over seas, and, like much-voyaged sherry, is counted a subject for the self-gratulations of her possessors, and the envious regard of outsiders.

Probably were these poor little jackdaws in peacock's feathers to be asked their own opinion on the subject, the world might hear something of the seamy side of a foreign school-girl's existence, some of the hardships endured patiently, some of the necessary things left unlearned, and the unimportant things laboriously acquired, only to prove unwieldy ballast when they enter the race for society favor.

Instead of learning a lesson from insect wisdom, we do not enlarge the cell of the little larva, which are, we hope, to become queen bees in the future, but on the contrary rather seek to force them into the narrower spiritual quarters allowed in alien hives.

THE gradual process of Europeanizing is too long to be treated here. It is a painful process from the awful sense of rebellion against the constant surveillance, the mortification of honesty misunderstood, the frightful loneliness which crushes at the beginning to the later submission to becoming like their surroundings, and the thousand sorrows, physical and mental, of an overworked, undervalued human being who has matched nervous energy against phlegmatic endurance.

These are all bad enough to contemplate, but there are pleasant places to remember, even in such a waste. The hardships might be overlooked were not the after-effects of such paramount consequence to a girl's future.

FROM the moment of her return to her native heath, the Europeanized American girl begins to find herself the victim of her misdirected education, but it is hardest of all that her strangeness is most apparent when she is confronted with the memories of her childhood in that home to which she has been looking as a kind of heaven, where she may enter into her earthly rest. All her little peculiarities misunderstood, or unobserved, all her ideas regarded as odd, her mannerisms smiled over, she stands among her kindred an alien in her own family.

At this time, too, her supersensitiveness, a product of her bringing up, is being irritated by her sense of unlikeness, which is one of the cardinal sins in her sociology. Her ideals are also undergoing demolition, and the chances are ten to one that, in trying to express something of the revolution in her poor little cosmos, her ignorance of the niceties of English will cause her to offend. Of course, her dreams of home are not realized; an exile's imaginings partake too much of the character of a mirage to be substantial.

Few of us have not experienced this in some degree on revisiting the haunts of our youth; some park which was once endless, but which, to our adult eyes, takes on contracted limits; some spacious hall which dwindles into an ordinary room; but in the case of the returned exile, this disagreeable shrinkage of value takes place in human beings as well as things. The little familiar jokes that are a spontaneous growth in every family are unknown to her; the friends whose names form part of the conversation are names only; the peculiarities of her relatives, which sweet usage would have made nearly as dear as their virtues, irritate and disconcert her. Yet this is the time when she must enter the world's arena and conquer or fall as she may in a contest where she is matched against the true American who comes fully armed for the many-sided exigencies of our freer existence.

THE first and greatest difficulty, and the one which will cling like a shirt of Nessus, is that of language as spoken, and, alas, even more in written form. Having won her intellectual spurs in a tournament with either French or German school books, the very names of men and places will sound strange in her ears, but when she shall chance to encounter a mythological reference her woes will indeed begin, for there is often only a thread of resemblance between the Greek forms used among the Teutons, or the Gallicized turn given them in France, and the English equivalent.

In foreign schools frequented by American girls there are apt to be enough of her compatriots to keep up the commoner forms of her mother tongue, but any one who has been long among them will agree that English-speaking girls abroad soon get to use a mixture of the two or more languages, laughable and almost incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Terms and phrases out of more advanced studies are boldly transplanted into French for the reason that the Anglo-saxon

equivalent is either unknown, or the scholar is too lazy to think it up. This is a habit which is of no importance while a girl is surrounded by people to whom both languages are equally familiar, but fraught with serious disadvantages when she is again placed in general society. The danger of being misunderstood, which is, in any event, the horror of budding womanhood, becomes ten-fold enhanced when any higher thought or aspiration halts it in its flight from the want of "winged words" to bear it upward. Nor has she the Greek and Latin necessary to assist her comprehension of the delicacies of verbal shading which she meets in her reading. Dead languages, although taught in boys' schools abroad, are not considered as either necessary or desirable in a girl's mental equipment.

FROM the cry prevalent about time wasted on ancient tongues, it is reasonable to suppose that here, as in most cases, blessings are only appreciated by those who do not possess them. Let any one try to cultivate an acquaintance with the higher forms of English without a previous foundation laid in the great root languages, and he will surely find that like the unwise builder who founded his house upon sand the structure will tumble about his ears in the first stress of weather.

This deficiency leaves the Europeanized American without a clew to the maze of English spelling. The closer she draws to this mighty, and to her, appalling problem, the surer is she that the Sphinx's riddle must have had some connection with our orthography.

The rigidly historic French, or the charmingly phonetic German, is no introduction to the bewildering variety of letter combination which we call spelling. Uncertain as the sea, but not equally fascinating, the adult mind is frightfully tossed about before it can learn to keep its feet in such unsteady waters, where a child's pliant instincts would have assisted its balance. For this as much as anything else, pity the Europeanized maiden.

Should time help her to master the intricacies of her mother tongue, she yet may never be able to conquer the habit of thinking foreign thoughts and measuring by foreign standards; she is, therefore, totally unfit for light skirmishing on conversational fields, and finds that before she can lumber up her heavy learning the point of attack has shifted to another quarter. It is years before such a girl ceases to be troubled with *l'esprit de l'escalier*.

An American education would have saved her from this form of social malady, and as well from diffidence and lack of initiative which hides any originality still growing in her too thoroughly cultivated mind.

ORIGINALITY is a quality apt to be condemned in foreign boarding schools, and even in America it usually finds its most enthusiastic admirers among the male sex. Women are inclined, as a rule, to sacrifice personality to convention, especially in the absence of masculine critics.

Segregation of the sexes has another and peculiarly disastrous effect on budding womanhood. Queerly enough, it has a double and directly opposed action, bringing about masculinity on one hand, and fostering a morbid sentimentality on the other.

In a house full of brothers, a girl learns at an early age that her chances of being pleased rest largely with her capacity to fascinate, and having received this dogma into her baby spirit she sets about (though all unconsciously) finding how best to gain her end. She may play marbles, climb trees, hunt and fish, but these accomplishments will never emancipate her from the reproach of being "only a girl." As she grows older, this fact, the bane of her childhood, suddenly becomes its own antidote, and from the throne of her womanhood she lays down the law to her former tyrants.

No such wholesome masculine influence does, or can, exist in a boarding school, and the maid of superabundant health and strength preserves her mannish characteristics far beyond the age when she would have outgrown them in the natural atmosphere of home life.

The other development of segregated woman-kind is equally unfortunate, and it is sometimes hard to say which horn of the dilemma is the sharpest, the tomboy, or the sentimental, undervalued little product of hot school-rooms and over-study.

[NOTE—The conclusion of Miss Davis's article on "The American Girl Who Studies Abroad" will appear in the next JOURNAL.—THE EDITOR.]

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