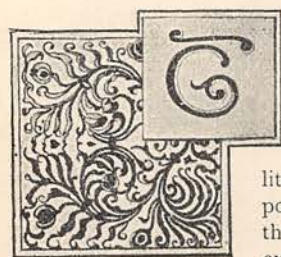


THE EDUCATION OF OUR GIRLS.
LIFE AT GIRTON COLLEGE.

BY RAYMOND BLATHWAYT.



GIRTON COLLEGE. EVENING.



THOSE who have read Miss Beatrice Harraden's charming little book, "Ships that Pass in the Night," will remember that her quaint little heroine one day expounded to her lover—surely the most odious lover that ever walked through the

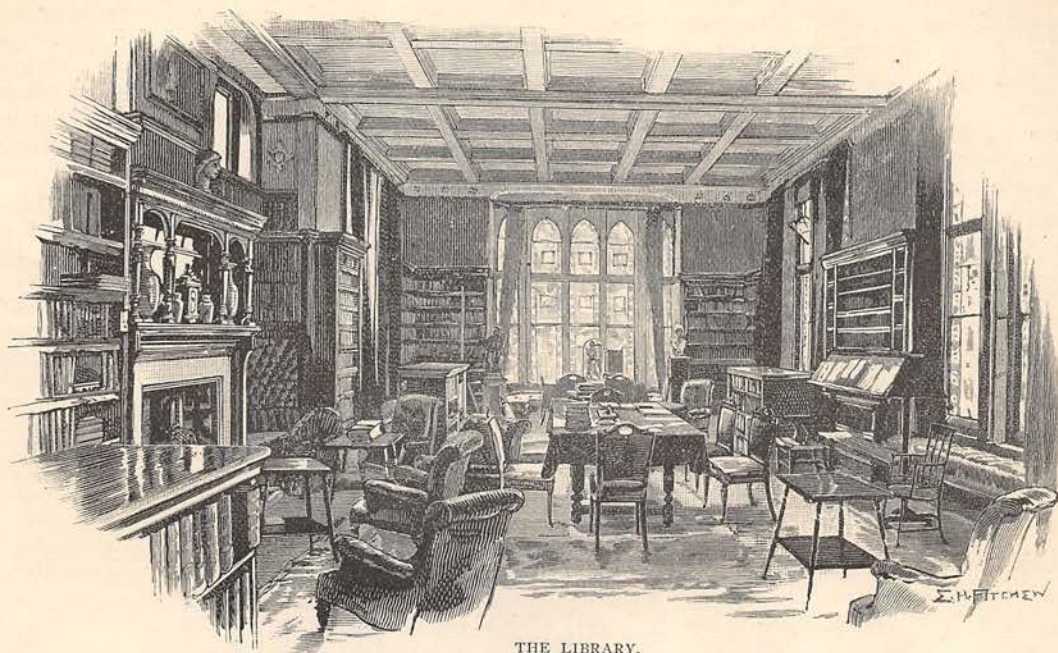
pages of a novel—her views upon the "Eternal Feminine" question. In the course of this exposition she touched upon the education of women, and thus delivered herself concerning the Girton girl:—

"The Girton girl of ten years ago," said she, "was a sombre and spectacled person, carelessly and dowdily dressed, who gave herself up to wisdom, and despised everyone who did not know the Agamemnon by heart. She was probably not loveable," continued this amiable little woman to the grim and stingy person stalking solemnly by her side; "but she deserves to be honourably and thankfully remembered. She fought for woman's right to be educated. The fresh-hearted young girl who nowadays plays a good game of tennis, and takes a high place in the classical or mathematical tripos, and is book-learned without being bookish, and who does not scorn to take pride in her looks because she happens to take pride in her books, is what she is by reason of that grave and loveless woman who won the battle for her."

A brave and generous defence of a hitherto much unloved, possibly unworthily despised, specimen of womanhood fast passing into the dim and distant past. But the words came to my mind as I drove along

the road that leads from Cambridge to Girton; and the beautiful red building came slowly into my vision, with its massive towers and tall chimneys stretching up into the quiet autumn sky, whilst the main building itself, clear-outlined against the distant blue, compelled the senses to regard it and consider. Consider what? Why, the whole revolution that has taken place—that is even now taking place—in our midst concerning the up-bringing of our girls, and the position they are for the future to occupy in this vast body politic.

As I drove up to the main entrance, the life of the college already began to unfold itself; in a moment, as it were, I felt that I had stepped into a new sphere; at any turn fresh revelations lay awaiting me. To begin with, a number of girls in red jerseys were rushing here and there, hotly and vigorously—I will not say inelegantly—contending for the mastery in a game of hockey. "Life is not all study at Girton," thought I to myself, as a neat-handed maiden preceded me down the long corridors to the rooms of the lady who was to take charge of me during my brief visit, and expound to me the mysteries of the vast establishment. For a few moments we sat in conversation, and then we commenced the round of the building. The Antiquities Room had a certain fascination of its own, inasmuch as its ancient Roman and British remains, dug up in the immediate neighbourhood, were in some respects quite unique; but the hurried entry of a young man, a lecturer from the University, and the following up of a large class of youthful maidens, caused us to beat a hasty retreat. In the Chemical Laboratory I caught a glimpse of white aprons, knitted bows, and dismayed regards at a huge bottle, whence certain



THE LIBRARY.

fearful odours were issuing in a cloud of dim smoke. I thought of the humorous and appropriate name applied to this department of their practical education by the brothers of these young women at Oxford, and I smiled quietly to myself.

"This is the Chemical Laboratory," my companion informed me.

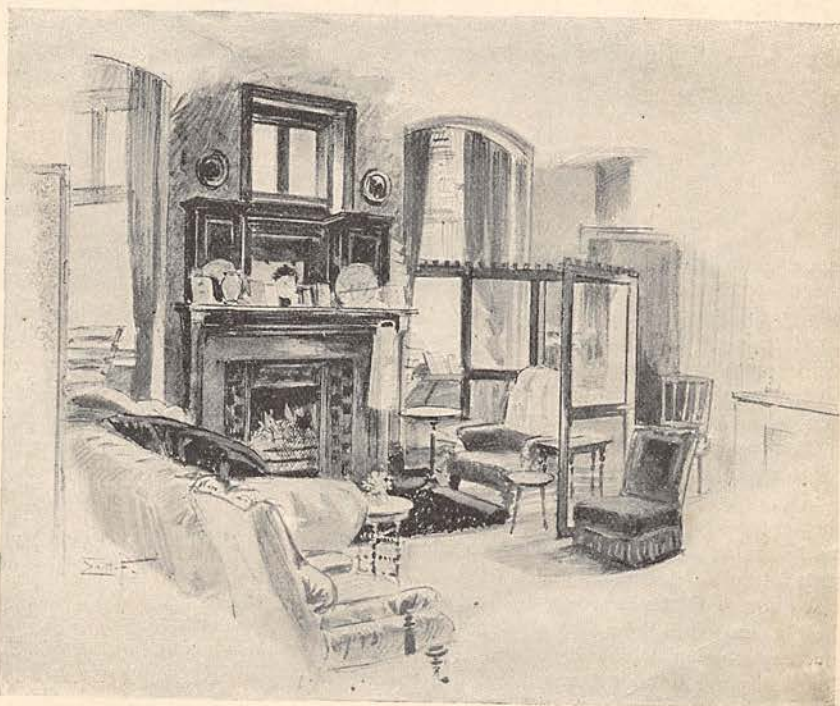
"I smell it," I replied; and we passed amusedly onward.

Then came a glimpse of an empty hospital.

"We do not have many patients, I am glad to say," continued my guide, as we entered the beautiful Dining Hall; "the life here is too regular and too healthy; and indeed," she added, with sarcastic meaning, "we have no time to be ill in Girton."

"The High Table" fascinated me. It was so curiously reminiscent of the adjacent University and its centuries-old life and

habits: so true is it that there is nothing new under the sun. The new is but a continuation of the old. Even our public libraries are but replicas of the libraries of Nineveh and Babylon. But this is a



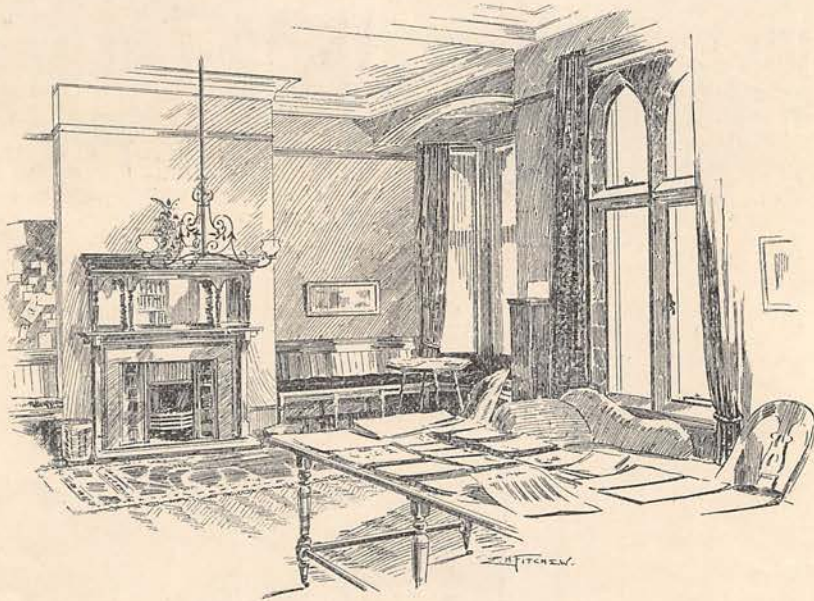
THE MISTRESS'S ROOM.

digression—or, if you like, a preliminary—to my glimpse of the lofty library, in which silence and a certain stately contemplativeness reigned supreme. A Girton girl sat reading here.

"She is a classical student," remarked the lady at my side; "for the classical students read here more than any of the others. But that generally means a majority in Girton, although at the present moment there are more students taking up mathematics than any other subject. The classics they take up are, of course, what would be required for the Classical Tripos at Cambridge, for as a general rule few girls come here who are not prepared to read for honours."

"Which is one reason," I replied, "why the girls,

"I think," replied my hostess, "that they read specially what is talked about at the time. They read all the good novelists of the day, but I don't know that their general tenor of thought is much affected by it. I don't think that they follow much in the lines of the new religious thought of the day, for instance," she explained, in reply to a remark I had made. "But then, again," she continued, "they are very keen on all questions of economical politics. They are well up in the labour disputes; but I do not think they have a very keen appreciation of all questions affecting their own sex. We have here, you must know, a good many Discussion Societies—Societies for discussing Social questions, Ethical Societies,



THE READING-ROOM.

as a rule, do better than the men. You have, in fact, a pick of the flock, while all sorts and conditions of men go through the University life."

"Certainly," was the reply; "it is understood that a girl comes here to read, whilst," rather caustically, "it has hitherto been almost equally understood that men go up to play. I am bound to acknowledge that in Cambridge things are much altered for the better."

"But you don't neglect athletics?"

"Oh, dear me, no! Golf, hockey, tennis, and the like, enter very largely into our college life. The yearly tennis match with Newnham always creates great interest and excitement."

A glimpse I caught at this moment of some special shelves devoted to the works of George Eliot, Tennyson, and Ruskin, which had been presented to the College by the authors themselves, led to a conversation on what the girls themselves generally read.

"Are they what I may term 'up-to-date' in their literature generally?" I asked.

Debating Societies. Last night we went into the question of the 'Abolition of the House of Lords.' We are rather conservative here, perhaps, and so the Bill was thrown out by a large majority. On another night the subject for discussion was 'Should Specialisation at the Universities be encouraged?'"

My hostess then led me into one of the little rooms in which these young ladies live, exactly as their brothers would in the University, and I found myself in a charming room, with a balcony outside, from which a glimpse of far-reaching low-lying country was obtained. Long level beautiful stretches of fen country met the gaze on all sides, country across which the shadows lengthily and lazily stretched themselves, and over which the great white sun-lit clouds climbing up over the horizon hung in round or rugged masses of splendour. These the setting sun reddened and gilded; the rays of dying day fell upon the autumn foliage, the birds wheeled in the air, and the evening breeze poured in through the open

window, bringing with it a delightful sensation of freedom and vastness curiously in harmony with the mental atmosphere by which I felt myself surrounded and pervaded. For I was the only man in this little

We are not obliged to attend prayers, but I think most of us do. Breakfast is on the tables in hall till nine o'clock. From twelve to three we have luncheon; both of these meals are quite informal. Afternoon tea is taken



THE DINING-ROOM.

group of feminines; and it was interesting to an outsider to note the bearing and the distinguishing characteristics of the little group.

For one thing, there was a gentle severity in each member of the party. Some have called that the Girton tone; however that may be, I know not. But those who know the University type well know that such a tone is characteristic of the undergraduate of Keble, in a broader and less restricted sense of the Trinity don in Cambridge, and, as I say, with the added charm of femininity of the student of Girton or of Newnham. They may not be aware of it—indeed, they may indignantly deny it, but it is there, and it is well that it should be so. It is the characteristic which at once differentiates them from their less thoughtful, less earnest, less occupied sisters in the butterfly world of fashion, from which they have by no means made a final exit; but to which, on the contrary, they return now and again with a certain undefinable *cachet* of superiority stamped upon them. One of my companions, entering into conversation with me, told me something of the daily life at Girton.

"Some of us," said she, "who are reading very hard, get up at five o'clock. We have an early cup of tea, and work till eight, when the mistress reads prayers.

round to our private rooms and to the lecture rooms at four o'clock. We dine all together at six o'clock. Many of us attend lectures in Cambridge, and I think we specially enjoy the walk or drive in. After dinner come our coffee parties, our club or society meetings, our committees, and all forms of social life generally. Now and again the fire-alarm is very unexpectedly given, and the Girton College Fire Brigade turns out for practice. Oh, yes!" she continued, replying to an exclamation of surprise on my part, "the Fire Brigade is quite an institution here. It was established in 1879, and we have three corps, consisting of the majority of the girls, with properly-appointed captain and officers. We have, of course, a system of registration, called 'Marking,' which shows that the requisite number of days in residence has been put in to enable us to keep our terms according to the University regulations; and we may not miss this marking or be absent from any lecture without special permission from the mistress."

The conversation going on around us now became interesting, for it began somewhat discursively to touch on the general effect on college life upon feminine character. I brought forward the opinion of certain thoughtful outsiders that the tendency was, frequently, towards a certain inevitable hardness of

character and towards selfishness in many individual women. This was vigorously overborne.

"No," said they in soft clamour; "it teaches a woman to be thoughtful, to be public-spirited, to be punctual; what is more selfish than unpunctuality? It gives them new ideas of honour—the outside woman's ideas as to honourable dealing both in herself and in others is frequently somewhat vague; it gives us new ideals."

"I must enter my protest," here interpolated my guide, "as to the assertion that women generally are wanting in strict ideas as to honourable dealing. I know so many who have never been to college who are most scrupulously honourable. At the same time I think that very strict ideas of honour are commoner among college girls than others."

"But does not college life tend to do away with the woman's usefulness at home? At least, so I have been told," I somewhat timidly urged.

"A woman loves her home even more after her life at Girton than she did before."

Indeed, it was universally conceded that the Girton girl of to-day—whatever she may have been in the past—is a pattern of all the domestic virtues. For

though now and again those stately halls resound to the chanting of the college song, in which they ask the one the other

"What in joy surpasses
A college life so free?"

Yet in actual experience the Girton girl despises not, but makes the best of, and endeavours to improve upon, the simple, if somewhat narrow and uneventful, life of the home. Nor was I sorry to learn of the Settlement mutually established and supported by Girton and Newnham, which is doing such a good work in far-off Southwark, and in support of which a weekly sewing party is held in each college, the Settlement itself and its work being supervised and directed by a Newnham student.

I stood that evening in the quadrangle of King's College. From King Henry VII.'s exquisite chapel there poured a rush of music, the organ pealing triumphantly, the beautiful voices of the boys now and again distinguishable through the soft thunder. The fountain splashed and glittered in the dying light; white-winged pigeons dipped now and again in the translucent water; a little kitten seated on the mossy stone basin gazed admiringly at its own reflection in the wave beneath; a grave professor passed me by, his gown rustling in the evening breeze.

The scenes of the evening and the afternoon were in striking contrast.



A STUDENT'S ROOM.