

ARTICLE III.

CO-EDUCATION AT OBERLIN.

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SINCE the establishment of Oberlin College, in 1833, the system of co-education, first introduced here, has been widely adopted in the land, and now prevails in most of the western colleges, including the state universities. The older colleges have not generally adopted the plan, but in the newer institutions, even as far east as Boston, the system has been hospitably entertained; while in the older colleges, by means of annexes and similar appliances, the effort is made to extend the advantages of the higher education to young women. Doubtless the success which has attended the arrangement at Oberlin has had some influence in promoting this extension; yet it is true that the plan of co-education as introduced into many of the larger schools, especially the state universities, is quite a different system from that which has been maintained here during the fifty-five years of the existence of the College. It has been thought that a statement of the methods employed in the experiment at Oberlin might be, in a measure, useful at this time; and I have been asked by the editors of the *Bibliotheca Sacra* to prepare such a statement.

Co-education at Oberlin did not originate in any radically new idea of the sphere and work of woman. The movement in this direction in the country is later than the establishment of co-education here. It is doubtless true that the work here has been modified more or less by the general change of view upon the subject abroad. But the original idea of the founders was, to bring young

men and young women together in the school, essentially after the fashion of a New England academy. The earliest circular makes the following announcement: "The Female Department, under the supervision of a lady, will furnish instruction in the useful branches taught in the best female seminaries; and its higher classes will be permitted to enjoy the privileges of such professorships in the Teachers', Collegiate, and Theological Departments as shall best suit their sex and prospective employment, Pupils may enter the Female Seminary for one term only, but none can enter the higher departments without expressing the determination to pursue such a course as the Faculty shall direct. The Preparatory School and Female Seminary may be entered at any age above eight; the Teachers' and Collegiate Departments cannot be entered under fourteen." The idea undoubtedly was, to have a female seminary which should constitute a distinct department of the school; but this idea was never realized. In a letter by Mrs. Dascomb, the first principal of this department, in which she gave to her friends at the East, whom she had just left, a view of things as she found them, are these statements: "I spend three or four hours daily in hearing classes recite. The females are very interesting—most of them from other States, and many from a distance. That department is not yet distinct from the other." Mrs. Dascomb manifestly expected that such a separation would take place, but it never came. The preparatory classes continued to be composed of boys and girls, because it was more economical and more interesting. At the same time a "Ladies' Course" was established to furnish to the young women the privileges of the higher education—a course adjusted to the regular College Course, so that in almost all their studies the young women would fall into the college classes pur-

¹ It was expected, at the beginning, that the children of the "Colony," after their first training in the Infant School, would enter the primary departments of the Collegiate Institute for further education. Hence the provision to receive them at eight years of age.

suings the same studies. This course at the outset provided for no study in the languages, except the Greek of the New Testament as an elective; but all the other studies of the College Course were included. With the arrangement adopted it was inevitable that young women should soon find their way into the regular college classes. They were taking Latin and Greek in the preparatory classes, and all the studies required for admission to the Freshman class; what more natural than that they should continue on with the class with which they had been associated during the two years of preparation? This, in fact, resulted in 1837, apparently causing a little surprise to those who had matters in charge, but without any resistance.

Thus without definite intention the plan of co-education was introduced into the college classes. There was no flourish of trumpets over the achievement, and the catalogue made no distinct display of it. The names of the four ladies who entered the Freshman class in 1837 are found in the catalogue for that year under the general heading, "Female Department," after the names of all the other young women, with the special heading, "College Course, Freshman Class." The next year they stand at the head of the Female Department, with the same special designation as in the preceding year. In 1840 the names of the young women in the different college classes are placed after the names of the young men of the same classes, under the title "Ladies." This arrangement continues to the present time, except that the title "Ladies" has been omitted since 1864. The arrangement of the catalogue seemed to throw the young women of the college classes out of the "female department," and in the minds of the more aspiring of the group the question arose, from time to time, whether they were under the control of the lady principal and the Ladies' Board, or were merely subject to college rules as administered by the general Faculty. To correct any misapprehension in this direction a standing sentence was introduced into the catalogue to this effect: "Young ladies in

college are required to conform to the general regulations of the Female Department." The general heading "Female Department," changed in 1862 to "Ladies' Department," was continued till 1875, and the term "Ladies' Course" was retained to the same time. Then the "Ladies' Course" became the "Literary Course," and was opened to young men. From this time on, the designation "Female Department" in the catalogue, which had been out of place since the names of the young women in college were placed with their classes, was dropped and the separate organization of that department—so far as pertains to classes and courses—disappears from our records. This tended to clear the public mind of the misapprehension that we had at Oberlin a young ladies' seminary, having more or less connection with the college. More than once the proposal had come to us to have our statistics, in the state and national reports, corrected upon the principle that we were two separate institutions, a college and a ladies' seminary, and should be so reported.

But while we have no special ladies' department, so far as pertains to classes and courses of study, and never had such a department, we have always had it so far as the general discipline and order of the school are concerned. In this view we have had from the beginning a lady principal, whose specialty has been the duty of guardianship of the young women, in the way of general instruction and supervision, and of special direction and advice such as mothers are supposed to afford their daughters at home, and such as inexperienced girls must need on leaving home and coming into new and strange relations in a large school. That the principal should be a teacher has been found desirable, but this has been held among us as a secondary matter.

Associated with the principal has been, since 1836, a "Ladies' Board of Managers," constituted by the trustees, co-ordinate in authority with the Faculty of the college, to whom is committed the charge of the young ladies in matters of general order and discipline. No young woman ap-

pears before the general Faculty in any matter of discipline, nor is any such case of discipline ever announced before the students as a body. The principal and the Ladies' Board take charge of the case from the beginning to the end, and thus all offensive publicity is avoided. The gathering of the young women for what is called "General Exercises," affords opportunity for advice and suggestion appropriate to their conditions, and the attention of the students as a whole is never called to their special needs or tendencies. By such arrangements we secure a similar guardianship for the privacy and the delicacy of the young women as is supposed to be provided for in schools exclusively for them. The Ladies' Board is composed of wives of members of the Faculty, and of persons intimately connected with the work of the college, so that, while they are legally independent in their action, there is no danger of a conflict of discipline in the two departments of the school. The connection of the two bodies is personal, not organic. There is no appeal from the Ladies' Board to the Faculty, and there has never been any conflict of authority or any collision or difference calling for the attention of the trustees. Thus far they have served the college without compensation. To outsiders the arrangement sometimes seems unnecessary and cumbersome, but in experience it has proved most salutary and helpful. It provides for, and secures, such a separation in the disciplinary affairs of the young men and young women as decency and propriety would seem to call for. Probably those who are managing mixed schools (as they are called) without such an arrangement, do not generally realize the want of it, but it would not be difficult to point out apparent indications of such a want. It is but a few weeks since, in a school of this kind in a neighboring State, a public admonition was given to the body of students assembled as usual for the chapel service, calling their attention to the unseemly gathering of considerable numbers of young men and young women about the steps of the ladies' building where they were in the habit of lingering, and notifying

them that the college was not running a matrimonial bureau, asking them to correct the unbecoming habit. The next evening all the young women came into the chapel attired as nuns. It seems probable that if those young women could have been instructed apart in a motherly way in self-respectful habits and conduct they could not have fallen into so grievous misdoing. Any such instruction is offensive, and essentially impossible, in the presence of the entire body of the students; and I know of no president or masculine professor, older or younger, from whom it could come with any impressiveness. A professor who undertook the work gave me his experience. The young women in his college had adopted the fashion of low-necked dresses, and as the weather was warm they appeared in chapel as their dress-makers had arrayed them, without any apprehension of the need of further covering. The professor undertook to arouse them to a sense of this need, and suggested that even a pocket handkerchief or a piece of cambric would improve the situation. The sewing machines in town were at once set to work, and the next evening the young women came in with a close-fitting, yellow cambric extension, occupying the vacant space. He regarded the result as evidence that they needed a lady principal and a ladies' board. Such occurrences may seem of no great importance in themselves, but they indicate an unhappy public sentiment and a sad want of lady-like culture. If our co-educational schools fail in this, it is a fatal failure. They have no sufficient reason for being. It is not enough that they give a good literary and scientific education. If they do not yield a true womanly character as the natural product of their work, they have no place in a true Christian civilization.

This leads to the general statement that co-education at Oberlin has never been conducted upon the idea that men and women are just alike, that they have the same outlook upon the duties of life, and should be trained for the

same career. It is assumed that the same book knowledge is good for both and that they may receive this in the same classes; as, at home and abroad, they receive the same daily food from the common table. But the expectation is that the boys will grow up men and the girls women, and it is the aim of the college to supply such educational forces and arrangements as shall secure this result. In carrying out this aim it has not seemed wise to have exactly the same rules and regulations for young men and young women. The principles and habits of general society have seemed to us to have some significance, and to suggest the propriety of some discriminations. We ask our young women to be in their rooms at half-past seven or eight o'clock in the evening, while we permit the young men to be out until ten. It may be a question whether this stricter limitation is for the benefit of the young women or the young men. It is unquestionably wholesome to both, and it is in the direction of the limitations which general society imposes. It would, in some cases, be good for the young men to adopt for themselves a similar limitation. But the world makes no such requirement of young men, and the college cannot overlook the fact. It would be regarded on every hand as treating the young men as children, while no such impression is made in the case of young women. We sometimes hear suggestions, and, so far as I have observed, they come chiefly from schools for young women exclusively, that it is unequal and unjust to make any such discrimination, that the rules should be the same for both sexes. Any discrimination seems offensive partiality. We have, at very rare intervals, had a young woman here who was burdened by these distinctions, and one I remember, a very brilliant scholar, who left Oberlin and completed her studies at Ann Arbor, because she was offended by them. But in general, we have little or no restiveness on the subject. It is obvious to one who thinks for a moment, that rules to be impartial for boys and girls

must not be the same. A boy can roam the fields, and climb fences and trees, and wade and swim and fish in every stream; and to restrict him in this freedom is a real hardship and injustice, while the average girl, American or otherwise, desires no such liberty. The same rules for the two would be most unequal. We are sometimes liable to forget this principle in our application of our rules to boys and to young men. We must be impartial, but impartiality does not require nor permit absolutely the same treatment. We cannot hold the college senior and the preparatory boy to the same rigid explanation of an absence. Years and experience must count for something, and, if we forget it, the young man feels abused. The boy is not abused; it is what he needs. The young man may *need* restriction and restraint, but he cannot accept it with satisfaction; the time has come when he must restrain himself, or do without it. There is a basis in the nature of things for our different regulations for young men and young women.

We have placed, at Oberlin, some limitations upon the association of young men and young women which are not found at many other co-educational schools. They are not united in the same literary societies and other voluntary associations, where they would meet together sharing in common exercises, without the presence of a teacher. This has been the order from the beginning, and, so far as I have learned, it is cheerfully accepted. These literary societies have, notwithstanding, enjoyed an almost unexampled prosperity. I once attended the anniversary of literary societies in a neighboring school, in which young men and young women were united in the same societies. A prominent feature of the exercises was a succession of innuendoes or flings, from one side and the other, supposed to be smart, but which seemed coarse and offensive. If co-education must tend in such a direction we cannot afford it. I have sometimes apprehended that *Class-day Exercises* with us were liable to be marred by a similar coarse-

ness. Our students have now and then made the mistake of taking for their models a style of college literature prevailing in schools for young men. It is the absence of young women that makes such a tone seem tolerable; their presence ought to make it impossible.

Every method of education which separates the young from ordinary society, and brings them into a community by themselves, must involve some disadvantages and dangers. A community of young men in college life is in many respects unnatural, involving a loss of the restraints of home and general society, at a period when such restraint is most needed. A community of young women is equally unnatural, yet the dangers are not so marked. The unfavorable tendencies are more subtle, but yet real. A collection of young men and women in the same school is a less marked departure from the conditions of ordinary society; yet it is a departure in that the young are thus separated from the wisdom and experience of maturity and age which ordinary society affords. In each of these systems some provision must be made for that which is lacking. In the college for young men the provision is the presence of professors who are supposed to bring the needed wisdom and experience. The supply is rarely adequate, and is sometimes poorly applied. In the young women's college two plans are about equally favored: one to commit the young women to the united influence of men and women instructors, in the hope that a proper family influence will be thus secured—a desirable balance of masculine and feminine forces, in the formation of character; the other provides only women as teachers, and limits the masculine influence to the man who runs upon the errands and looks after the basement. In co-educational institutions two methods obtain. One may be called the state university system, in which no difference in the needs of young men and young women is recognized: the doors are thrown open to all; young women come into town, and engage their own boarding-places, find their way to the

steward's office and pay their bills, and then present themselves for classification, and then for the recitation. Here they meet only men, who have no responsibility beyond the recitation hour. The system is said to work well, but it is difficult to see any reason why it should. A week ago I received the catalogue of our most famous and successful state university, to which I have given a little attention. I found the statement that the University is open to all, without distinction of sex. I turned to the summary and found 1,882 students in attendance, in all departments, but no mention of any women. I opened to the list of students, and still found no indication of any women, except that the names catalogically arranged presented an indiscriminate mixture of Johns and Janes and Williams and Marys, leaving the reader to settle the question for himself as to the proportionate numbers. I undertook the solution of the problem, but found it beyond my capacity. Are the names Frank and Marion and Myrn and Hollie masculine or feminine? Allowing for these unknown quantities as well as I could, I found two hundred and sixty or two hundred and seventy young women registered at the University. I turned to the pages giving the names of the faculty and found among the hundred and nine professors, assistants, and instructors, the names of four women, three of them connected with the medical department, one in the hospital, and two employed for the special instruction of the young women in anatomy and related branches, and the fourth an assistant in microscopical botany. I find no indication, from beginning to end, of any other provision for special instruction or counsel, or guardianship for these young women. They do not seem to be dealt with as young women, except in the one particular of separate instruction in the dissecting room. I refer to this university as the most conspicuous example of the later forms of co-educational arrangement, and as likely to establish the method for state universities.

The plan at Oberlin stands very distinctly over against

his. The young woman coming here is received by the principal and assistant principal, is advised and directed in the selecting of her boarding-place, and suitable arrangements at this boarding-place are secured in advance; her selection of studies, and classification are seen to by these same advisers, the office of the principal is open every day for the answering of every question and relieving of every perplexity. Once in two weeks the young women meet the principal for such suggestions and instruction in the way of conduct and character as may be helpful. In the class-room, during the earlier years of her course, the young woman meets some lady teacher every day, whose bearing and character prove a help to her. Every teacher recognizes her as a lady, by placing her name with other ladies on his roll, and addressing her as *Miss* when he calls upon her for recitation. In the general catalogue she is made account of by having her name stand with those of other young women, and by being counted in the general summary. Her class standing is never published so as to bring her into competition with others of either sex. Only in the appointments for commencement is the idea of class-standing ever suggested, and then, young men and young women are not brought into comparison with each other. We do not and cannot afford to stimulate competition between the young men and young women by publishing their marks at home or abroad.

It is obvious that such special provision for young women involves a corresponding expense, but it is vastly less than would be required to establish a separate college for the young women with all the adequate advantages and appliances. There must be a lady principal, whose personal character and influence shall give her command of the situation and, where large numbers are gathered, she must have an assistant of similar character and influence. There must be a dormitory building furnishing pleasant rooms and an attractive home for young women, where the office of the principal shall

be found, and which shall serve as the centre of influence for this entire department. We have not found it necessary at Oberlin to provide dormitory arrangements for the six hundred young women in attendance. The three buildings devoted to this use accommodate about one hundred and fifty; and there is no requirement upon any one to take a room in them. They are found to be so pleasant and inviting that the rooms are all engaged at least a term in advance. The remainder of the six hundred are distributed among the families of the place, which open their doors to receive them. In these families they come essentially under the same regulations as in the halls provided for them. The lady principal is in frequent communication with the matrons in these families, and secures their hearty co-operation and sympathy in the work; an advantage which it might be difficult to secure anywhere but in a college community. But a school of this kind tends to gather about itself families that are in cordial sympathy with the general order. In this respect Oberlin has been greatly favored.

It thus appears that the experiment of co-education is going forward in different institutions under quite different conditions, and its success in one form may not establish its success in a very different form.