



MAGILL (E. H.)
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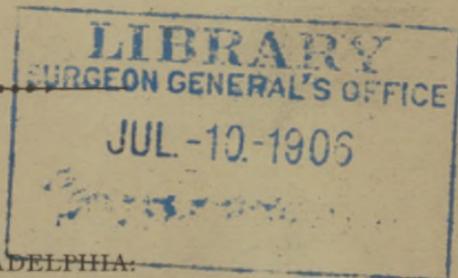
UPON THE

CO-EDUCATION OF THE SEXES.

BY

EDWARD H. MAGILL,

President of Swarthmore College, Delaware County, Pa.



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1873.

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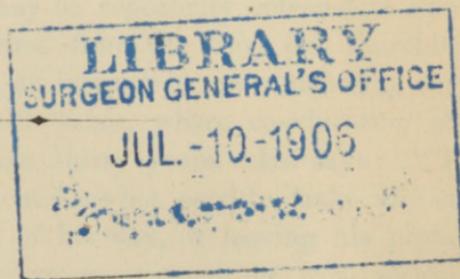
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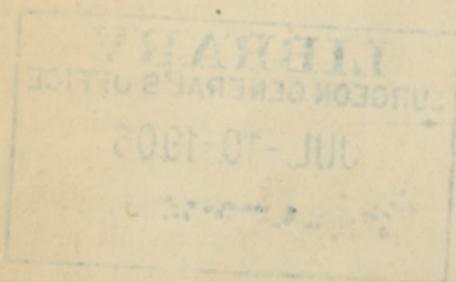
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CO-EDUCATION OF THE SEXES.

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That the sexes should be educated together in our higher institutions of learning, seems to partake so much of the nature of an axiom, as to be almost incapable of proof. It is indeed rather a question of practice than of theory, and co-education being certainly the *normal* if not the *existing* condition of things, the burden of proof rests mainly with those who oppose it. Motives of economy, and simplicity of organization, certainly demand it, unless some weighty reasons can be given why it is undesirable. That the moral and social effect of educating the sexes together is in every way advantageous to them both, may be considered as fully established by the united testimony of men of large practical experience. Pages of conclusive evidence upon this point might be quoted from the principals of large normal schools in different parts of the country, in which the mixed system has been thoroughly tested for the past quarter of a century, but it is urged, though wholly without reason, that conclusions thus reached would not be applicable to colleges. I will therefore confine myself chiefly to the testimony of presidents and professors of the different colleges in the country where this system has been tried. The number of these being yet comparatively small, the same men may be repeatedly referred to upon different points. I quote first from the Rev. Dr. Fairchild, President of Oberlin College, an institution now numbering over one thousand students, of both sexes, where co-education has been well tested for more than thirty years. He says: "To secure social culture the student does not need to make any expenditure of time, going out of his way, or leaving his proper work for the pleasure or improvement resulting from society. He finds himself naturally in the midst of it, and he adjusts himself to it instinctively. It influences his manners, his feelings, his thoughts. He may be as little conscious of the sources of

the influence as of the sunlight, or the atmosphere; it will envelope him all the same, saving him from the excessive introversion, the morbid fancies and moroseness which sometimes arise in secluded study, giving elasticity of spirit, and even of movement, and refinement of character not readily attained out of society." The Rev. Dr. Hosmer, President of Antioch College, and a successor of Horace Mann, speaking of the students of Antioch, says: "As to character and conduct I am sure that our young men have been improved; rendered more orderly, gentle, and manly; and our young women stronger and more earnest, by being members of the same institution and meeting in the recitations."

It is a common remark that institutions for both sexes, to be successful, must be placed under carefully guarded and able management. This is a necessary condition of success *everywhere*, in *all* institutions, and I maintain that the same organizing ability and power of control which will manage successfully an institution for one sex alone, will be even *more* successful where the sexes are united. The difficulties which loom up, and seem so insurmountable in theory, vanish in practice. Those who have always been accustomed to see young men and young women in separate institutions of learning, and who know how much time and thought they spend upon each other when thus separated, are apt to suppose that this difficulty would be increased if they were educated together. No conclusion could be more fallacious. There is nothing like daily association in the class-room, and competition in study, to wear off the halo of young romance, and enable them to see each other as they really are. That they will be likely to form acquaintances which will result in matrimonial engagements after leaving college cannot, of course, be denied. Upon this point I quote from the Rev. Dr. Fairchild. He says: "If this is a fatal objection, the system must be pronounced a failure. The *majority* of young people form such acquaintances between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, and these are the years devoted to a course of study. It would be a most unnatural state of things if such acquaintances should *not* be made. The *reasonable* inquiry in the case is whether such acquaintances and engagements can be made under

circumstances more favorable to a wise and considerate adjustment, or more promising of a happy result." When we consider how rashly young persons ordinarily enter into this, the most important of all engagements, with but an imperfect knowledge of each other's characters, we can readily judge whether the case would be made worse if these acquaintances were made during a course of study, where, by daily association in the classes, young persons have the best opportunities to know each other's real character. Under such circumstances, so far from improper alliances growing out of such relations, it is clear that the very reverse must be the result, and that many very unsuitable alliances will thereby be prevented.

That the daily association of young men and young women in the pursuit of their studies has a refining and elevating effect upon *both*, is a matter of common observation with all who have seen the experiment fairly tried. It is generally believed that, while it may produce this favorable result upon young men, it is not so clear in the case of young women, and that what is gained by the one, in this respect, is lost by the other. This is an error in theory, which practical experience cannot fail to correct. Upon this point let me quote the words of President White, of the Cornell University. In a recent report upon this subject he says: "As to the good effect on the *women* who have actually entered colleges, the testimony is ample. The committee in its visits found no opposing statements, either from college officers, students of either sex, or citizens of university towns, and all observations failed to detect *any* symptoms of *any* loss of the distinctive *womanly* qualities so highly prized." I quote the following words from a letter recently received from the father of a young woman who has spent three years with us at Swarthmore College. He says: "Her sojourn with you has been of great service to her, and I think it will have a permanent effect in forming her character. Aside from the book knowledge to be obtained, we wished to accomplish two purposes in sending her from home; first, to throw her more upon her own resources, and thus strengthen a rather yielding character, lacking self-esteem; and second, we wanted her to associate with young men in such a competitive way that when she meets them

in society she will be better able to understand, weigh and value them at their *real worth*, and not be dazed by her first contact with the other sex."

I need not multiply words, nor heap up testimony on the subject. We all understand that brothers and sisters, in every well-regulated family, exercise a mutually refining and elevating effect upon each other, and that it is always a misfortune to either to be deprived of the influence of the other. What is true in the family is equally true in the school or college, under proper regulations. How many have seen a son or brother return home after years of constant association with his own sex only, in school or college, awkward and rude, with a mind stored with knowledge, dearly purchased at a totally unnecessary expense of refinement and cultivation; and how many, on the other hand, have seen a sister or daughter return after a similar absence, and long association with her own sex only, at school, simpering and shy in the presence of the other sex, and with the most romantic and exalted ideas of their character, often to be corrected by bitter experience and the sacrifice of a life which might have been useful and happy; and how sad a thought it is that a foolish and unreasoning prejudice will continue this great wrong to both sexes, by depriving each, through these critical formative years, of the society of the other.

Having shown that morally and socially young persons are improved by co-education, I come now to consider its effect upon scholarship. In the first place let me say that if high *scholarship* must be sacrificed to elevate the *moral* standard of the rising generation, let it be sacrificed; but that no such sacrifice will be necessary we have already abundant testimony. Some men are fond of saying that girls readily keep pace with boys in their earlier studies, and even outstrip them, but when they advance further, and the *real work* begins, they fall behind. It is not at all uncommon to hear this remark from those who are especially fortunate that in *their* race for intellectual distinction, young women have not had the opportunity to compete. It is growing less and less safe to make this gratuitous statement as facilities for higher education are gradually being opened to women. Wherever the attempt has been made to present equal

opportunities to the two sexes, women have not suffered by the comparison. Upon this point let us hear the testimony of the President of Oberlin. He says: "During my own experience as professor, eight years in ancient languages—Latin, Greek and Hebrew, eleven in mathematics abstract and applied, and eight in philosophical and ethical studies, *I have never observed any difference in the sexes as to performance in the recitations.*" President White in a recent address says: "The best Greek scholar among 1300 students of the University of Michigan a few years since, the best mathematical scholar in one of the largest classes of that institution to-day, and several among the highest in natural science, and in the general courses of study, are young women."

Take these statements in connection with the fact that facilities for the higher education of woman are so rare and of so recent date, and do they not clearly show that women can successfully compete with men in intellectual efforts? That women of distinction in the various departments of learning have arisen, in the face of all the discouragements placed in their way, and that young women compete so successfully with young men in those institutions where they have been admitted of latter years, are facts which form a triumphant refutation of the unfounded charge that women always fall behind when they come to the *real work*. I am forcibly reminded in this connection of the remark of Professor Walter Smith, a man of large educational experience in England, now State Director of Art Education in Massachusetts. He says: "I have heard young men, who never taught a mixed class of males and females for an hour in their lives, glibly lay down the axiom that 'man's is the reasoning and progressive mind, woman's the contemplative and conservative mind,' and then proceed to account for this phenomenon by quotations of the opinions of the philosophers, or by the recital of their own experience—observation made, probably, during a ball or a pic-nic."

But even if it were true that women, generally, would be found, upon trial, unequal to men, it would be no argument whatever for closing the doors of our colleges against them. Let that matter settle itself by the examinations for admission,

and the biennials, just as it does for boys and men of varying capacity. Nor does it change the aspect of this question that the great majority of girls *will not be likely to seek* a collegiate education. President Angell, of the University of Michigan, in a letter recently received, says:—"Those girls who do wish a collegiate education should have a chance to get it; and since our colleges cannot be duplicated for women, they should be admitted, unless some serious practical objections can be shown. In fact, all who try the experiment report that *there are none*. We have not had the slightest embarrassment from the reception of women. They have done their work admirably, and, apparently, with no peril to their health." Why do we presume to dictate to woman what particular course is proper for her sphere? Let all avenues of knowledge be opened to both sexes alike, and let both alike, under a judicious optional system, freely partake of the knowledge which they desire. Fear not the lowering of the standard of literary institutions by the change proposed. The women who will seek admission to the newly opened institutions of learning will rather stimulate by their presence and example than lower the standard by their deficient scholarship. Professor Cooley, of the Law department of the University of Michigan, and Chief Justice of the State, says:—"You are mis-informed if you are told that the standard of admission is lowered by admitting women to the University. The tendency has been in the other direction."

I must here take occasion to remark that if our young women would be successful in pursuing the higher courses now opening before them, they must be willing to devote several years of their early womanhood to earnest study, not be in too great haste to enter society, and give less of their time and thoughts to dress and to fashionable accomplishments. Unless our girls and young women are willing to make this reasonable sacrifice, these things will continue to be in the future, as they have been in the past, among the chief causes of the inferior education of woman.

It may be contended that, admitting the capacity of young women to compete with young men, the scholarship of the colleges must nevertheless suffer because the presence of the op-

posite sex would prevent that earnest undivided devotion to study so essential to a high grade of scholarship. What is the *present* order of things? Do the young men in our colleges devote no time nor thought to the society of the opposite sex during their college course? President White, when investigating this subject, found that this objection had no weight in the University of Michigan, where co-education has been tried for the past four years. He says: "There has been less social intercourse between the young women and young men in college than between the latter and the daughters of citizens in the town *not* in college; the young ladies seem to be quietly on their guard against receiving too much attention from students of the other sex." The reason is obvious. Their thoughts are otherwise occupied.

I come now to allude briefly, and with great diffidence, to our own institution (Swarthmore College) as it is yet in its infancy, and we cannot speak from either long or extensive experience. It contains over two hundred students of both sexes, nearly equal in numbers. All reside in the same college building; sit together in the classes, in the general study hall and at table; are together freely in the halls and parlors, and upon certain portions of the grounds between recitation hours and on holidays—of course under the care and conscientious oversight of a large body of resident instructors and professors of both sexes. Of the result thus far (and we have been established four years) I will say in a word that the effect upon *character, manners* and *scholarship* has been such as to satisfy the highest hopes of the advocates of the system, and silence the cavilling and objections of those who, upon theoretical grounds, predicted an early failure. The few who still doubt are invariably those whose minds were made up from the beginning, and who have always kept aloof from us, and never witnessed the practical working of our system for themselves.

I have thus endeavored to show that *morally* and *socially* co-education is productive of the best results; and that scholarship will not suffer, but rather be promoted by it.

With reference to the single point which remains, the effect of study upon the health of young women, the testimony is

ample. T. W. Higginson, in a paper upon, "Higher Education for Women" recently read before the American Social Science Association in Boston, states, that statistics do not prove that educated women are more sickly than those who are ignorant; and, that more girls sink listlessly into disease from the sheer reason of having nothing to do, to study, or to think of, than are injured by over-study. In the discussion which followed the reading of the paper, Mrs. Cheney used these impressive words:—"Grateful as I feel to Mr. Higginson for what he has said of the relation of study to the health of women, I wish him to put it much stronger. I believe that good mental discipline is the very thing most needed to restore the health of our girls. I see so many girls break down from the gayeties of society, and so many restored from ill health by earnest purposes and study, that I feel it to be a positive truth, not only that good study would not hurt women, but would save them." In speaking of this subject President Raymond, of Vassar College, said; "I challenge the United States to produce 400 girls as healthy as those of our college." Prof. Maria Mitchell added her emphatic testimony to that of President Raymond. Most of the ill health of girls and young women who are pursuing a course of study, and who are generally supposed to be suffering from close confinement and over-exertion, is fairly attributable to other causes. The Principal of a leading normal school in New England informed me, a few years ago, that a promising young woman of his class, who had just died of brain fever, was believed to have died from hard study, whereas he knew that she was in the habit of returning from parties at midnight or later, and being ambitious to excel in her classes, she would then study two or three hours before retiring, thus almost wholly depriving herself of sleep, and that other cases, quite similar to this, had fallen under his observation. President Fairchild of Oberlin, who has had larger experience, and better opportunities to judge than perhaps any other man in this country, says:—"Nor is there any manifest inability on the part of young women to endure the required labor. A breaking down in health does not appear to be more frequent than with young men. We have not observed a more frequent interruption of study on this account; nor do statistics show a greater draft

upon the vital forces in the case of those who have completed the full college course. Of young ladies who have graduated since 1841, the deaths have been *one in twelve*; of the young men, a little more than *one in eleven*." You will perceive that this comparison, based upon thirty-one years' statistics, is more favorable to women than that shown by our ordinary tables of mortality for the same age. We may hence infer that the pursuit of collegiate studies is rather *favorable* to the health of women than *prejudicial* to it; and this conclusion, reached by statistics, we might readily reach through simple reasoning, the regular habits induced by the life of a student being more conducive to health and longevity than the frivolous excitements and irregular hours indulged in by the devotees of society.

The theoretical objections to co-education in our higher institutions of learning are daily giving way before the test of practical experience. The most decided opponents of the system are those who have never tried it, or seen it tried; its strongest advocates those who, having witnessed the effects of the separate system, have brought co-education to the test of daily practice. This fact alone speaks volumes in its favor. The tide is surely advancing, and not ebbing, as some of our leading educators would have us believe.

Nothing short of co-equal educational advantages, and the same degrees conferred upon both sexes for equal attainments, will meet the demands of the times. It will be in vain to attempt to resist this claim by the offer to confer other marks of distinction, which fall short of, or are different from the degrees regularly conferred. These may be well; at least the offer to confer them is a significant sign of the times. They can, however, scarcely be regarded as other than milestones on the way of progress, and not the ultimate goal. If the practical objections to admitting women to the undergraduate classes are considered insuperable, we might naturally inquire why they might not receive the same degrees as the regular graduates, if prepared to pass the same examinations. It is not a sufficient answer to say that but few women would pass the ordeal were the opportunity offered. If they cannot be admitted to the classes, this experiment, at least, might be fairly tried.

President Raymond, while acknowledging himself in favor of co-education, calls it the Millennial System of Education. If he means by this that it will prevail only when the Millennium arrives, if he reads aright the signs of the times, he must surely regard the Millennium as near. Well may Harvard condescend to consider and discuss this question, when it is claiming the serious consideration of so many of the colleges throughout the country; and, in its own immediate vicinity, the Boston University, with its munificent donation of ten million dollars to begin with, is to throw open the doors of all its departments to women. Surely the tide is rising; and placing our chair upon the sinking sands, and insisting that it is ebbing, while the waves dash over our feet, cannot delay it by a single hour.

In conclusion, let me say that this question seems to assume different *forms* in different parts of the world. Were we discussing it to-day in some city of the Orient instead of in Philadelphia, it would probably be worded:—"Can women be allowed to go unveiled in the streets, or sit at the table with their lords without endangering the public morals?" Were we in Paris, it might be: "Can respectable young women ever appear unattended in the public streets?" In Palestrina or Lugnano or Subiaco, it might take the form: "Are women capable of any office higher than that of beasts of burden?" In Philadelphia we ask: "Can young men and young women be safely educated together in the same institution," and, "Are women capable of making the same intellectual acquirements as men." These different questions are but different *forms* of the same question, varying according to different localities and different latitudes. The time will come when our posterity will read with amazement and incredulity the statement that in the city of Philadelphia, after the middle of the nineteenth century, the question was seriously entertained by a dignified and intelligent body of educators, in advance of their age in many things, whether women were intellectually equal to men, and whether the sexes should be educated together in our higher institutions of learning.

APPENDIX.

LETTER FROM PRESIDENT FAIRCHILD.

Reference has been frequently made in this pamphlet to President Fairchild, of Oberlin College. In the recent discussion upon "Higher Education for Women" at the American Social Science Association in Boston, some shade of doubt was cast upon the success of co-education in Oberlin and other institutions, where it has been tried in the West. I therefore addressed to the President a letter of inquiry, that I might be assured that his views upon this subject had undergone no change. The following, received since the foregoing pages were in type, is his reply. I give it without comment. It speaks for itself.

{ OBERLIN COLLEGE, OHIO,
May 26th, 1873.

PRESIDENT MAGILL,

MY DEAR SIR:—

The only report which I have seen of President Eliot's recent remarks on the subject of the education of women is that of the New York Tribune. If this report be correct President Eliot must labor under some misapprehension. It is true that we have a special "Ladies' Course," and far the larger portion of our young ladies pursue this course; but this "Ladies' Course" was adopted at the founding of the school, and the admission of young ladies to the full college (classical) course was a subsequent matter. No such thing was thought of in the beginning. It was granted, at length, to a few young ladies, who desired the fuller course. Of the *four* who first entered upon this course, in 1837, *three* completed it; and from that time there have been more or less pursuing this course. The numbers have varied from 10 to 36, but by what law I have not been able to discover. There have been several fluctuations from a maximum to a minimum, and the reverse, within the last thirty years. We have recently reached the lowest number, and are apparently again on the increase.

No special influence is used with the young ladies. They select their own course, with such advice as they choose to seek.

I know of no foundation for the idea that the college course for ladies is looked upon with disfavor here. Several of the professors have given their daughters this course, and others are arranging to do the same. It is regarded as a question of health and taste for study, and there seems to be no more apprehension, among us, in regard to the success of a young woman, in this course, than of a young man. A young woman is just as likely to lead the class as otherwise.

President Eliot speaks of a conversation with the "Matron," whose opinion was decided against the college course for ladies. The Principal of the Ladies' Department, when President Eliot was with us, and for many years before, tells me that she never held such an opinion, and has always regretted that she did not advise her own daughter to take the college course instead of the other. Our present Principal pursued the "Ladies' Course" and she told me to-day that it was the regret of her life that she did not take the college course. Since her graduation she has endeavored to make up the lack.

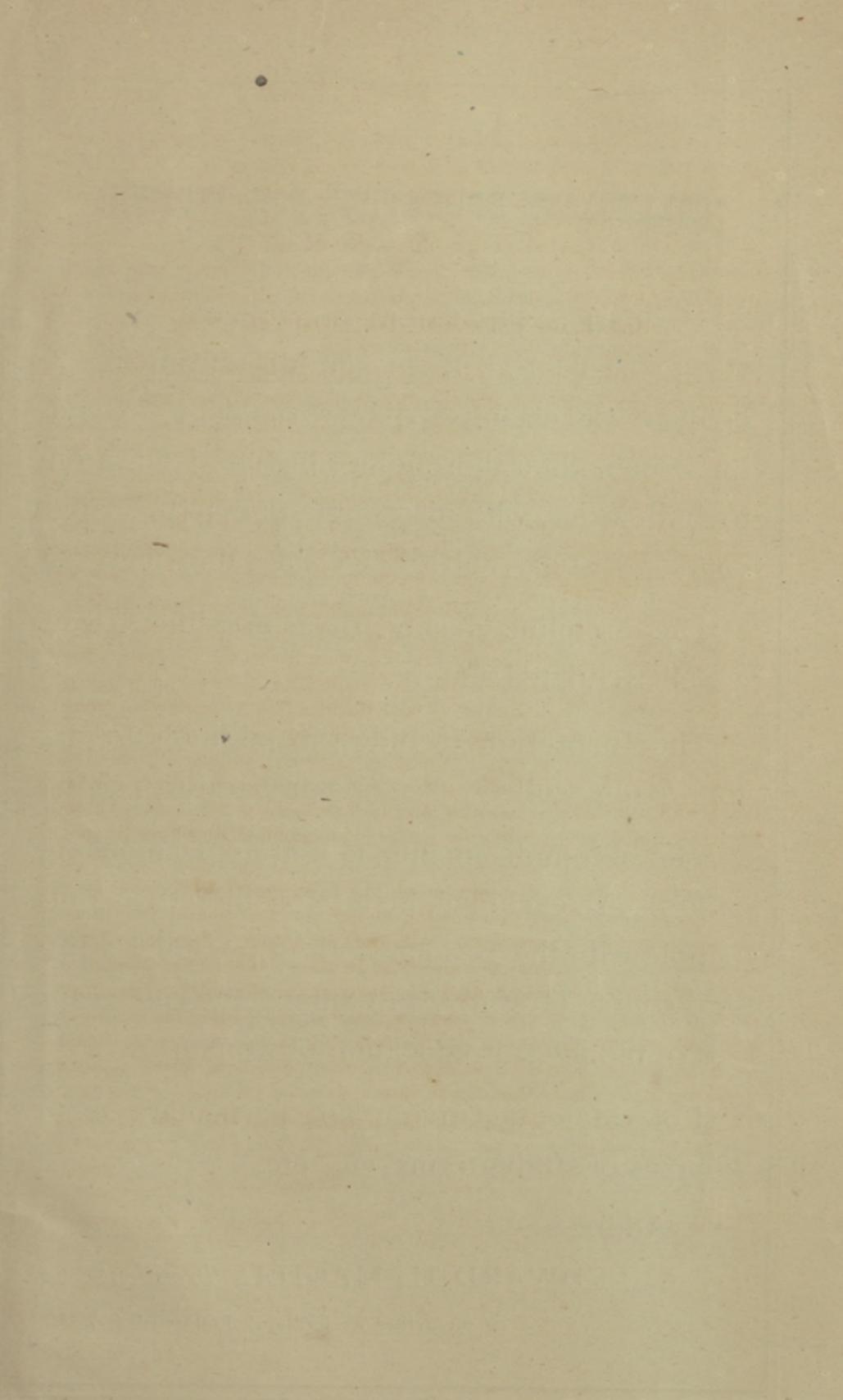
Probably none among us think that the full college course is as often desirable for young women as for young men. But it should be understood that our "Ladies' Course" involves about five years of study after a common school education;—i. e. *four* years after *one* year of preparation in Latin and Mathematics. Our college course requires *three* years of preparation. Our "Ladies' Course" is the equivalent of the "Scientific" Course in this College, in Michigan University, and in other Western Schools. The young ladies, after the first two years of their course, recite with the college classes, when their studies are the same, without any special difficulty, so that our entire arrangement involves the fact of co-education.

There has been but one opinion among us in regard to the success of the "experiment;" and there is not to-day the first symptom of a reactionary feeling, among either teachers or pupils. Nor have I the slightest evidence of any such re-action in the schools of the West that have adopted the system, and I am somewhat intimately acquainted with most of them. A few days since, I was at the University of Michigan, where ladies have been in attendance for two or three years. One of the professors told me that almost all the professors were opposed to the arrangement at the outset; now not one.

These are the facts with us, as they stand to-day. You can use them as you think best.

Truly, your friend,

JAMES H. FAIRCHILD.



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