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EARLIEST YEARS AT VASSAR



1865

EARLIEST YEARS AT VASSAR

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

BY

FRANCES A. WOOD
(Librarian)

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EARLIEST YEARS AT VASSAR.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

FRANCES A. WOOD, *Librarian.*

The more I recall of the early times, the more unwritable any account becomes by reason of the personal element. The charm and delight lay chiefly in the close confidence of mutual friendly relations. "A chiel among us taking notes" would not have been tolerated in those days. I never expected to regret not keeping a journal, but I do now as I realize how much precious and interesting history has been lost in consequence.

One of the first teachers in the Latin department had to deal with a student so literal as to afford much amusement by her continual habit of asking, "What is the exact date of this event?" One day in class, allusion was made to the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, when the girl unthinkingly began her usual query. The teacher despairingly interrupted,— "Thank heaven, Miss —, there is a period in history in which there are no dates."

So you are invited to look back with me to the time in Vassar history when it began,—when practically there were no dates; the time when the word "female" was still carved over the entrance, and had not yet been stricken from the spoons. As to that word, there seems to have been much discussion about its use from the first and objections made to it, for the Evangelist in 1860 had a long article in defence, summing up the matter in this wise:—"We hope the college will not be persuaded to change the title on account of any prudish antipathy on the part of a few who entertain a false prejudice against the word female, and who are utterly unable to find a substitute for it, or suggest any graceful circumlocution by which it can be avoided."

It may be interesting to the student of to-day to know the sort of setting in which her eldest Vassar sister was placed. The course of study laid out here was substantially what was prepared for her brothers in colleges for men at that period, and requiring the same proficiency in grade to enter. But of this the purpose is not to give record of what the early catalogues testify. It is rather a little picture of the life and customs at the beginning, over forty years ago, when all was new and we were all young. It is not from the students' point of view. That side ought to have a chronicler from one of themselves. If only all the letters written home from the college for the first dozen years could have been saved, the narrative would be of far greater interest than this can hope to be.

With the interest attaching to great enterprises hardly anything is too small or insignificant to be counted. How the Founder first got his idea to do something for women, what the highest opportunities were for women nearly fifty years ago, are on record and need no further chronicler. All the various steps in development of the great enterprise, the discouragements of building in the face of civil war, the lack of enthusiasm in public opinion,—all this is familiar history.

The sketch by Benson J. Lossing entitled "Vassar College and its Founder" tells the story of the beginning, describing the equipment—rich for that period,—giving a picture of that proud and happy first Founder's Day, when with a line of students each side his carriage, with flags and songs and banners Mr. Vassar was escorted up from the lodge, and, in the enthusiasm of his triumphal procession and welcome, perhaps first realized what he had done for women—what he had instituted for all time. Let us hope in the general gladness and gratitude he had the richest sense of reward, a consciousness that he had done wisely and well, felt, in short, that in the fullest Yankee sense "it had paid."

When a full history of the college comes to be written—as it will be—of this great epoch in educational history, we shall realize still more what it was to have faith to establish the first properly equipped college for women, and the wonder of Dr. Raymond's work in its organization. No one can read the history as given in his "Life and Letters" without increased appreciation of what it was to evolve out of chaos the educational life and policy of the college with the social as well. In this latter part he was incomparably assisted by Miss Lyman—a power, too, in her day and time.

It is interesting to trace the record of growth and development from the beginning, and to notice the change from sceptical opinion or amused tolerance to belief and acceptance. The Founder began collecting press notices, and the treasured annals of the library collection owe their start to him.



1865

In the main, the notices were dignified and commendatory:—"A munificent enterprise. With the progress of our civilization, the sphere of personal activity enlarges for women as well as for men, and education must keep pace with its progress.... The institution is intended to be all that the term college imparts; to be ultimately what Yale, Harvard, and Brown are to young men."

The New York Evening Post of 1860 says:—"It is not to be for a moment supposed that this plan of instruction involves a departure from the field of activity which nature has for the female sex, or of unfitting them for the duties which their own tastes as well as the requirements of society indicate them to perform.... No institution of note has yet ventured to admit females much further than into the mysteries of the rudiments." (Female delicacy, female industry, female mind, female college were terms hard worked in those days. A belief of sex in mind was universal.)

Now and then an attempt to be facetious was made. The New York Times in 1860 also had its say of the new enterprise as follows:—"What do you think of a woman's college? And why not? After Allopathic, Hydropathic, Homeopathic and patent pill colleges, universities and all that sort of thing, why not let the girls have one? For the life of me I do not discover any very valid objection, but objection or no objection, the thing is to be. By a bill introduced this morning, Matthew Vassar, William Kelly, James Harper, E. L. Magoon, B. J. Lossing, S. F. B. Morse and a dozen or more gentlemen among the Knowing and the Known are authorized to be the body corporate of a female college. The said college is to have full power to educate feminines and to grant them sheepskins the same as any other college is authorized and wont to do."



THE FOUNDER
1865

Ten members constituted the Faculty in 1865-68, seven men with the President, and three

women—Miss Lyman, lady principal, Miss Mitchell, director of the observatory, and Dr. Avery, the resident physician. The seven chairs filled by men could boast degrees and titles, but there were none for women those days. There were no associate professors, no instructors in departments ranking teachers, simply Faculty and teachers for many years. Nowadays, the catalogue bristles with degrees, and not to have A.B. or something after one's name is the rare exception.

The teachers numbered twenty that first year; the second, the number had increased to thirty-four and of these nine taught music, the largest department in the college and—as we that were in it thought—the most important.

The first catalogue, issued 1865-66, shows the whole number of students as 353, all unclassified, owing to the inequalities of preparation. Among this number were many very far advanced in general scholarship, but who had certain exceptional deficiencies preventing their entering a regular class at once. By the end of the second year, however, all were graded. It is not strange that at the outset so many should be unfitted to enter, when hitherto no preparation for women to take a college training had been provided for in the land.

It was a wonderful thing when Vassar opened for a girl to have the chance to go to college, and the contrast between then and now when it is quite a matter of course, and not at all an exceptional thing, strikes me rather sharply, as I see a privilege counted so precious once made light of in these days, or worse—wholly disregarded.

The numbers continued without much change, 411 in 1871, stretching to the limit suitable provision for them. If this seems pitiful to you, one of a thousand to-day, remember that at the first, 300 was about the highest number reckoned on, and for this number accommodations were none too plentiful with recitation rooms, art-gallery, library and museum all in one building. Many of the earliest students will recall making one of seven in a "fire-wall" parlor, other suites being crowded in similar proportion; but however uncomfortable and dissatisfied she might have been, the girl made little complaint, sustained, doubtless, by the proud consciousness of being a pioneer student in the first college for women ever established.

By the tabular statement with this will be seen the steady increase of proportion of students in full collegiate standing.

	Total.	Full Standing.	Conditioned.	Special.	Unclassified.
1865-66	353
1866-67	386	97	22	189	78
				Preparatory.	
1867-68	339	141	75	123	..
1868-69	362	162	126	72	..
1869-70	382	171	150	59	..
1870-71	381	174	141	65	..
1871-72	415	205	151	58	..
1872-73	411	235	135	41	..
1873-74	411	239	146	21	..
1874-75	384	225	159	11	..

There was an importance attaching to the students in full standing, a sort of aristocracy, if you please, not defined or put in words, but none the less felt and appreciated. Even the teachers who had upper class work shared this, and those not so favored would say on occasion in mock grievance,—“I am only a Prep. teacher” or “only a music teacher,” as the case might be.

In 1868-69 the first resident graduates were recorded, Louise Parsons and Mary Reybold.

The specials in art and music were required to pass the regular preparatory entrance examinations, and to take two collegiate studies in connection with their special work. This arrangement was abolished in 1892 when the history and theory of music and of art were made to count towards a degree.

The trustees voted to close the Preparatory Department, June 8, 1886.

The first class to graduate was in 1867. They were four in number—“the immortal IV”—as Dr. Raymond characterized them at the planting of their class ivy, for there were then no class trees by adoption. No diploma was given to the class on the day of graduation, the trustees hesitating to admit the propriety of the term Bachelor of Arts as applied to women. Instead, the four received a sort of special certificate stating their proficiency “in science and the arts.” Later, the next year, when the matter was satisfactorily adjusted, they received the regular parchment document.

The early fortunate possessors of the degree of A.B.—once given only to men—were regarded with admiring awe, and they had not to strive much for any desired position coveted. A successful young woman teacher of experience entered college to go through the course in two years, to the wonder of some friends who regarded her as having no need of a degree. “I want it for commercial purposes,” was her shrewd reply. She had her reward in advancement far beyond what hitherto had been perfectly satisfactory. It is now a matter of course that a candidate for

any position should have a college education, and the well earned degree confers no special distinction. Indeed, it has come to pass that the almost indifferent comment is, "Well, what has she done since?"

A favorite question to the college girl was, "What good does this higher education do? Can you make a better pudding for it?" "I'll tell you what good the college does," laughed a certain bright student, "it is a great place to take the starch out of one! Why, at home I thought I was somebody; here I find the only somebody is the best scholar in the classroom."

The President taught mental and moral philosophy as the catalogue stated it. He also gave some lectures in history, as did the professor of ancient and modern languages and the professor of English. Under the term natural philosophy came mathematics, physics and chemistry, and the term natural history covered the wide field of science now separated into special departments. Biology was taught under zoology, and an amusing incident in class at one time was when one of the number (afterwards a surgeon and doctor) exclaimed in dismay at sight of the eye of an ox laid on her table for dissection, "O Professor, mayn't we have forks?"

The second year of the college was little changed from the first, and so the distinction of being "an aborigine," as Miss Mitchell dubbed the officers that came in '65, was bestowed on a few of us who had just missed that date. She always brought some little present for the band on her return to college each year, and it delighted her to add a fresh anecdote, told as we walked down a corridor, her large, serious eyes twinkling with fun.

"How did the college look when you came in '67?" is a question often asked me. It was a February night after a day of snow, rain and sleet, when the six o'clock train from New York landed me at Poughkeepsie. Then came the long drive out to the college over the heavy muddy road, unlighted beyond the city limits, which were not built out as thickly as now, and from Bull's Head (Arlington) at the turn, hardly at all.



JOHN H. RAYMOND
1865

The driver ushered me in at the old lower entrance, and, as a matter of course, gathered up my hand-baggage and preceded me up the central stairway to the messenger room. This would be an unusual proceeding to-day, but was most friendly and grateful then in the strange place. My handbag had a defective lock with a trick of unexpectedly flying open, and I recall its unhappy click, click, as I nervously followed him up the stairs. My name was given to be sent to Miss Lyman, whom I awaited, very ill at ease, in the parlor. Soon a tall figure appeared in black silk dress, white fleecy shawl, white hair in curls under black lace cap, both hands extended in smiling greeting as if an old friend had arrived. "We have been looking for you all day, and had just begun to fear we must give you up for to-night." A relative could hardly have been received more cordially, or with more entire absence of inspection.

I had been summoned in midyear to fill a sudden vacancy in the music department, the preliminary formalities having been waived somehow in my case, and I was not looking to be received so perfectly as a welcome guest of honor. Needless to say, all misgivings vanished and I felt at home at once. A teacher with whom I had been associated elsewhere was sent for to take me to my room, supper ordered served there, teachers rooming in the same corridor came to

greet the newcomer, and the evening that promised to be forlorn and dreary changed into a gay reception with friendly warmth and good cheer. Professor Wiebe, in whose department I was to teach, lived in the north wing near my room, and soon presented himself with his wife to welcome me. Madame Wiebe also taught in the department—was a musician herself of no mean ability. Really, it seems as I live it all over that the sunshiny outlook has never dimmed.



EDWARD WIEBE
1865

The next day, Washington's Birthday, was a holiday, and opportunity given to inspect the grounds and building. A narrow gravel path each side of the avenue led up from the lodge—the one old landmark exactly the same as now. Evergreens, so small one could almost touch the tops with the hand, bordered those paths. The first catalogue contained an engraving of these walks and front of the building, and a framed copy of one with photographs of that year is preserved in the library.

What we know as the museum was then the riding school with a German nobleman in charge, and groups of his pupils might be seen every pleasant day, riding around the great circle laid out for the purpose beyond the flower garden. Parties of more advanced riders were taken by the Baron outside the grounds, to the envy of the less skilled. The experiment of the riding school proved too expensive with its horses, grooms and master, and had at the end of six years to be given up.

The observatory was the only other building outside (with the exception of the boiler and engine house), and a gravel walk led up to its doors also. There were none but soft paths and few of these anywhere at that time. Later, an unsightly wooden walk replaced the gravel ones from the lodge to the front entrance. It was several years after this that the flagging was laid, and asphalt pavement here and there around the grounds begun.

The museum collections at the beginning were all in the main building, some occupying the space of the fifth center corridor, and it was in this long gallery that I had my first meeting with the Founder. I had gone one day by myself to wander about looking at specimens of minerals when the door opened and a benevolent white haired old gentleman entered. There was no mistaking the man of the portrait with his old time dress,—ruffled shirt front, diamond pin and wonderfully kind expression—and I went forward to pay my homage. He seemed familiar with the collections, pointing out whatever was especially valuable and curious as we walked around together. "I often come up here to see these," he said smilingly. He gave a reception at his house in town that second year for the Faculty and teachers of the college to meet the trustees and friends of his living in town, and I recall a delightful, genial host who made us all feel as if we belonged to him—were a part of his family.

On the fourth corridor—the whole west front below, was the art-gallery with Professor Van Ingen as director. The library was under this in the center of the third corridor, more like a room of the kind in a gentleman's house, and conducted somewhat in the same delightful free and easy fashion. Newspapers and periodicals were in this room also, open for daily use, but books could be drawn only at recreation period, Wednesday and Saturday, though they might be returned whenever the library was open. In a college community the library is destined to be an important factor, feeding the whole group of departments, and it is not hard to see how the small beginning

here should go on by leaps and bounds, keeping pace with the wonderful growth in other directions, till it reached the stately structure which is its home to-day.

The first organ to be placed in the chapel had no case. Instead, there was an arrangement of heavy red curtains across the back of the platform, with the large portrait of the Founder in front, concealing all unsightliness. The music rooms were back of the organ, on the third and fourth floors used now by the steward's department. Professor Wiebe had his large classroom and office on the upper floor and there were held the departmental meetings. Access to these rooms was through the doors each side of the chapel platform and through the small doors at the farther end of the gallery. The office where the music supplies were stored and given out was in the little room opening from the south end of the platform. The conservatory method obtained at first, the ensemble playing being conducted in the museum, in a large room near the gymnasium, capable of holding the several pianos necessary.

Professor Mitchell had her classroom at the observatory, but with that exception all other recitations were in the one main building, in the center each side of the main entrance. The President's classroom adjoined his office, now the senior parlor. In 1865, Room J was Dr. Avery's recitation room, and later was famous as the English literature and logic classroom in the day of Professor Backus. This is now the officers' parlor. There was no students' room for dancing. This was done at the gymnasium sometimes in the evenings, permission to go over first having to be obtained.

On the first corridor, where are now the stationery department, offices of the superintendent and resident physician, were three connecting rooms assigned to the chemistry department,—laboratory, classroom and lecture room. Across the corridor to the east where the express office and janitor's office are now were the two rooms of physics, a large classroom with smaller one adjoining for the apparatus. Dr. Avery had her office in her private suite on the fourth south, with the infirmary in near proximity at the other end of the hall. Mr. Wheeler, the first janitor, who was on the college ground from the time the first spadeful of earth was dug up for the building, had for his office the small room close by the center stairway on the first corridor.



CHARLES S. FARRAR
1865

Professor Farrar's chemistry and physics courses were extremely popular, and days when special experiments were in order the lecture room would be crowded. The teachers all had the privilege of attending lectures, and many did regular work in some one department other than her own, supplementing boarding school training and taking the college degree after a time.

I remember one day his holding up a small vial in each hand, explaining elaborately the contents of each, and what the chemical effect would be when the two should be poured together. The class watched in breathless attention. "Now, young ladies," and the bottles were lifted high that all might see, "you will observe"—repeating the formula—and then pouring them with quick, deft movement together. Nothing happened. Who that saw it but must remember the blank amazement of the professor's face and the hearty laugh all round in which he joined. "Well, that never turned out so with me before."

Beyond the center south where are now the candy-kitchen and day students' parlor was the

natural history lecture and classroom. The cabinets of minerals were beautifully arranged in a long gallery on the fifth center and consulted there as occasion required. The story goes that a student busy with her topic one day was interrupted by the entrance of a visitor who patronizingly asked, "Well, what are you so absorbed in?" She raised her eyes. "The odontology of the bison, sir." He fell back a few paces, gazed at her in silence a moment, and then left the room.

The collections of birds, shells, etc., were placed on the third corridor center in rooms now devoted to student use.

A domestic in employ of the college, whose special charge was the natural history classroom, was noticed gazing at the wall where hung engravings of some huge mammals of prehistoric time. "Were those rale bastes, Professor?" He assured her that such once lived, whereupon she commented complacently, "Well, I s'pose the men and women then were equal to 'em."

The Venus of Milos stood in the gymnasium, and two workmen had been sent to change slightly its position. One was overheard asking why the surface of the statue was so chipped and rough. His companion answered with an air of finality, "The Doctor uses this to illustrate her lectures on skin diseases."

Space fails to recount all the little jokes. "Bacchanalian Sunday" a young student called Baccalaureate in perfect good faith.

"I am glad the old Main looks unchanged inside as much as it does. I should say those were the same old water tanks, had you not told me otherwise. I used to room in this parlor here, and wonder if I could find my name with those of my roommates still written on the inside shutters?" And she did.

But the alumna returning after a long period of years does find many changes, concerning chiefly the routine of daily life, manners and customs, what was known in her time having disappeared almost entirely. Let us begin with the first schedule of the college hours:

Rising	6.00 A.M.
Morning prayers	6.45
Breakfast	7.00
Arrangement of rooms	7.30
Silent time	7.40
Morning study hours	9.00-12.40
Dinner	1.00 P.M.
Recreation period	2.00-2.40
Afternoon study hours	2.45-5.45
Supper	6.00
Evening prayers followed by silent time	6.30
Evening study hour	8.00-9.00
Retiring	9.40-10.00

For a few years, chapel prayers were held both morning and evening. Miss Lyman officiated in the morning, taking this occasion for her wonderful talks to the students with such notices as were required for the day. In the first catalogues issued was a long list of necessary equipment, including a waterproof cloak, a long woolen garment popular in that time. This article of attire was much in vogue at early prayers, and I think it was her disgust at the sight of so many black robed figures in the procession filing into chapel that caused the change from prayers at 6.45 to directly after breakfast. So in '68 the service was at 7.45—an adroit device we considered—of getting the family up in time. How thankful many were for the fashion of trailing princesse wrapper, and I believe no college inmate was without one. The day of the short skirt for walking had not come, only very young girls having that comfort and luxury. The grey woolen gymnastic suit was "en régle" for excursions to Cedar Ridge and country roundabout, but it was not considered quite proper even there or to be seen outside the gymnasium.

Miss Lyman was very particular in matters of dress, insisting on change for supper, as if going out for the evening. No one was allowed to wear the same costume all day. "You may take off one calico frock and put on a fresh one of the same kind, if you can do no better, but some sort of change is essential." Also in the matter of gloves she held us all up to wear them at every college function. It was thought extremely elegant for even the one who was to deliver essay or poem on the chapel platform to wear white gloves. Happily this custom was not long lived. "If there is a student here who cannot afford white gloves—even of lisle thread, I shall be glad to provide a pair." The last year of her life she wore gloves constantly to conceal her wasted, emaciated hands.

Now and then her edicts had no force, as when she gave out that no one must go on the grounds after sunset without wearing a wrap. To the general delight, that same summer evening saw Mrs. Raymond guiltless of shawl, strolling around the flower garden with the President, both bareheaded, so afterwards we pursued our way as we pleased.

She could not tolerate anything slovenly or slipshod, and no careless person escaped her watchful eye. On all Commencement occasions each member of the graduating class had to be

inspected beforehand, attired in the gown to be worn that day. A heavy black walnut table—such as was placed in every student parlor—stood in Miss Lyman's bedroom, with steps beside it, which Winnie, the maid, assisted each student to mount. Then, sitting in her arm-chair near, Miss Lyman criticised the slowly revolving figure on the table, and any slight alteration desirable to make, the maid in waiting was ready to do.

She was keen to see anything out of the ordinary dead level, as two teachers, who had started to walk to town one afternoon through the thick spring mud and slush, found out. Their aim was to have something besides the regulation exercise, and they were getting it by literally wading near the stone wall of the college grounds, when Miss Lyman came in sight returning from her daily drive. "This settles our fate," said one, fishing up her overshoe from the depths and mounting the wall to restore the hideous article. "She will never respect us again." Miss Lyman did halt her carriage near with concern, and could hardly believe there was no urgent necessity for an undertaking so foolish, but smilingly reassured them, "The road is nothing here to what it is lower down. But do go on if you like it." I am sure she envied the rude health that could start on such an excursion, for she added lingeringly, "How I wish I were strong enough to do that sort of thing too!"

The corridors were designed by the architect to be suitable as promenade places in inclement weather, and were so used a good deal. There was a tradition of a distinguished senior regularly taking her walk in her special corridor like a nun in a cloister, her eyes bent on a little black morocco book in hand, which some curious person contrived to find out to be a Greek Testament. Students waiting for recitation signal often strolled up and down just beforehand. Miss Lyman came along one morning, joining a young freshman waiting for her class, and taking the girl's arm, paced with her slowly up and down a few times to the student's embarrassed pleasure. Not a word was spoken till the bell struck and Miss Lyman turned to leave,—“My dear, you do not walk quite properly. You should turn your toes out a little more.”



HANNAH W. LYMAN
1865

What a power Miss Lyman was and what a presence! The evil doer shrank before her biting sarcasm, and when the matter of establishing any change came up, it was her felicitous phrase that generally settled the business. Alluding to the custom at one time of loading the wall of students' parlors with photographs of young men friends: "If you must have your—er—Julius Caesar up where you can see him constantly"—a ripple of laughter went round the chapel and the sentence was not finished, but the photographs disappeared.

She practiced what she preached in matters of personal attire. Of slender, tall, imposing figure, always beautifully dressed,—black silk in the evening, lavender muslin or soft grey cashmere in the morning with dainty cap, the long streamers floating over the filmy shawl she was rarely seen without, her white hair curled, as was the fashion for elderly ladies of that time, and around her pale face,—she made a picture as if she had stepped out of some old portrait. Notman's photograph taken at the same time as others of the Faculty in the spring of '67 does not convey the etherealness, the delicate spirituality of her looks. She seemed in her pallor and invalidism extremely venerable to us, and as if she must be well along towards eighty, but she was only a little over fifty when she died.

It was pre-eminently a family in the old days, not a community as now. The distinction between Faculty and teachers was rather sharply drawn, but this was more than made up by the close personal relations between officers and students. The teachers were made to feel a part of the social life. They had a definite place in receiving and entertaining guests at all public functions, and could not stay away without their absence being noticed and for this called gently to account. It was not considered exactly as "getting permission," but no teacher went out of college for the night without signifying her intention both to Miss Lyman and Dr. Raymond. It would seem as if Miss Lyman alone was the person to receive all such requests, but she always answered cordially,—"Certainly, and will you speak to the President also?"

The general exodus from any college affair promising no personal interest was unheard of. I remember once after an unbroken succession of Friday evening lectures there was an universal feeling of weariness and indifference when it was unexpectedly announced at evening prayers that we were to have a lecture on Shakespeare at the close of the evening study hour. How Dr. Raymond suspected that the audience would fall off—that there might be many absentees—we never guessed, but word went round to each corridor teacher to inform her domain that everybody was expected to attend. That such a proceeding should have been necessary gave rise next evening to a quiet rebuke,—“I have been a student of Shakespeare for more than twenty years, and I have never found any lecturer on this subject yet from whom I could not get profit and instruction.”

Those were tremendous occasions when Dr. Raymond felt moved to reprimand. Merciless and all out of proportion to the offence, we sometimes thought the talks then, but who shall say what was not checked of lawlessness in the beginning and disgrace in the end? The old chapel has seen and heard a great variety in its day, and if the walls could speak, what histories might be unfolded! Two weddings have been held there, one in June with daisy decorations, the other in autumn with brilliant hues and warmer coloring. Dr. Raymond had never performed the ceremony till he did so for his daughters. He wrote a special service, and very beautiful and impressive he made it.

A set of rules, drawn up by Miss Lyman and known as the "Students' Manual" was printed in pamphlet form, and a copy placed in each parlor. She also read to each entering class certain other rules concerning deportment. If these rules caused some rather indignant amusement, as being absurd and childish, unfitting college students, now and then a case was apparent where the "cap fitted," and a hint was given without offence.

Students studied in their rooms, and visits to and from rooms at any time during study hours were not allowed except by permission from the lady principal. Special permission also had to be obtained for going out of the building after dark, except when due at the gymnasium or the observatory. Students' visitors were received in the college parlor by Miss Lyman or her assistant, and students were not expected to enter there till summoned. Neither were they allowed to make use of the main entrance hall, but must go out and come in by the rear doors, and through those in the towers in either wing.

It was impressed upon the whole family that the higher education of women was an experiment, and that the world was looking on, watching its success or defeat. The good of the college was the watchword, and not mere gratification of individual preferences. Many a girl has admitted that her first sense of the importance of law and order came from the rules she often rebelled against. If too much paternal government was whispered even thus early, a student with several roommates in a small parlor, and subject to intrusive friends in study hours without protection of rule, had some reason to be thankful for it. There was only one building, and no escape from it to a quiet place to work under better conditions. All had to live up to a tremendously high standard—the ordinary one not enough for those days. It was difficult to keep on this mountain peak continually, but if we fell off now and then it was from no lack of admonition. "The good of the college!" "The good of the college!" was reiterated constantly. Light-hearted law breakers caught visiting in study hours or in silent time, or in some other equally innocent, reprehensible proceeding would gravely parody in excuse, "We did it for the good of the college." But nobody had daring sufficient to let this answer reach the "higher powers."

Frequent absence from college was not thought advisable. Even the student whose home was in town was restricted, once in three weeks when she went home to spend the night, being the rule, but not strictly enforced. Holidays and times when there was any special festivity there was no escape. You were made to feel so essential in the family life as to consider it a little disloyal to evade any function. Rarely did any one other than the student living in town go away for Thanksgiving Day. A great deal was made of this festival, the dinner and the entertainment afterwards.

The Christmas vacation was not the cheerless occasion of wholesale departure, as in this day of large numbers. The students, who from necessity had to stay over, or who preferred to—as many did—could hardly have had more done for their pleasure and entertainment if they had been visiting in a private family. In addition to the various plans among themselves, the college gave them masquerade and dancing parties, musical or theatrical entertainment, candy pulls, and sleigh rides, so no girl had reason to complain of dullness, or envy her fortunate roommate at home. One Christmas, the idea of an original play was started, but would have fallen through if Dr. Raymond had not come to the rescue with advice and ready pen. He entered into the spirit of the thing immensely, taking a part with other officer volunteers, making a brilliant success of what at first promised forlorn failure.

Three minutes were allowed after the last stroke of the gong signal for meals. Those entering the dining-room later had to stop at Miss Lyman's table and give explanation of tardiness before taking their seats. At dinner and supper, all remained at table until the bell was struck as the signal for rising, but at breakfast each withdrew at her own pleasure, excused by the teacher presiding at her table.

The food was abundant and excellent. We had a substantial breakfast, and dinner at one. Supper was a light meal, with an occasional hot dish of some sort. Miss Mitchell coming to the dining-room late one evening inquired as she took her seat,—“What is the meaning of the unusually happy faces I see around?” “Baked potatoes for supper.” “How pitiful,” was her comment. There was the disgruntled one among us—as there always is—but no one could take exception in earnest to the meals set before us.

We had our little jokes of course. One evening at sunset as two teachers stood at a window gazing at the blaze of color in the western sky, one exclaimed rapturously, “Isn't this glorious!” “Yes,” sighed the other, “how I wish I could eat it!” Another time was after the early breakfast as we were assembling for prayers. In Miss Lyman's increasing feebleness the service devolved on Miss Lephah Clarke acting as assistant lady principal. We music teachers sat in the choir and the organist often chose the hymn. One of our number asked the privilege of selection that morning, and gravely presented the book to Miss Clarke, the hymn chosen beginning,—

“Lord, what a wretched land is this
That yields us no supplies.”

Miss Clarke's composure remained unmoved, and she forgave the audacity of the offence, but laughingly begged the experiment not to be repeated.

The Founder's friend, Mr. William Smith, of Smith Brothers, was connected with the college for two years, one before the opening in equipment of the steward's department, and the next year in superintending its successful operation. There was no separate laundry building, and the basement was fitted up with proper machinery for this under his direction. Every detail of his important department was instituted and established by Mr. Smith. He also arranged for the system of steam heating—a new thing in this city at that time—through the entire building.

The tables in the dining-room were alternately a short one seating ten, and a longer one seating fourteen, with a teacher at the head of each. The small rooms near the entrance were designed by the architect as cloak-rooms, but were utilized at once for practice at table of French and of German conversation. The corresponding rooms above near the chapel door were also diverted from the original plan, and still do primeval duty as linen closet and storage place. Notices given out at morning prayers in Miss Lyman's time, later were read in the dining-room up to 1892, when a bulletin board was placed in the second corridor center, doing away with the custom.

The Students' Manual stated, “Direct traffic with the Steward's Storeroom is forbidden.” The student wishing to purchase fruit and crackers—about the only articles obtainable—brought her money for purchase to her corridor teacher at breakfast, with a list of what was wanted. The teacher made the purchase and the articles were delivered by messenger to the student's room.

There were corridor teachers in those days. They had the large rooms facing the corridor at each end of the building and commanding full view of the domain in charge. The duties of this teacher were to see that the rules as laid down in the Manual for lights, exercise, study-hour, silent time, and, yes,—baths, were kept. She also held a short office hour daily for the benefit of those wishing to consult her. She taught a Bible class and had a weekly prayer meeting, besides the special Sunday evening service.

Twenty minutes daily, morning and evening, were devoted to silent time, by which every student was absolutely sure of some part of the day entirely to herself. It was no easy task to provide places for the observance of this custom or to enforce it, and reluctantly, after some years it was dropped.

All meetings opened with prayer, corridor meetings as well. At these meetings—every Monday evening after chapel—the students reported perfect or deficient, as the case might be, and also received such general admonition as the teacher deemed advisable. Later the same evening all the corridor teachers met Miss Lyman in her parlor to give their respective reports and to receive her counsel and direction. This meeting was also opened with prayer.

The lights in the corridors had to be extinguished promptly at the stroke of the ten o'clock bell. The President's office was under the student rooms, and some officer there in business conference one evening saw him lift his hand in salutation to the ceiling, saying as the gas over his study table flared up suddenly at the sound of the gong, “My faithful daughters!”

Others were not quite so prompt. “It seems,” said a witty teacher as we walked slowly down her corridor long after the bell had struck one “laundry-bag night,” waving her hand to the long row of lights in full force, “it seems it is never too late to mend!”

One joke played on the teachers who had to look after the lights was hugely appreciated by them as well as those who played it. Some trouble with the gas had come up, and candles and candlesticks had been furnished to each room for temporary use, the word going round that

lights must be put out at ten as usual. And so they were "put out" and on exact time, but on the floor of the corridor near each door, candles still blazing. The teachers patrolled as usual, making no sign that the proceeding was at all unusual, greatly enjoying the scene, and appreciating the giggles and whispers of watchers from inside bedroom windows. The watchman had double duty, as he went his rounds, but that was all.

The only means of conveyance to town, unless one ordered a special carriage, was by the omnibus—a vehicle something like the old Fifth Avenue stage—which made stated journeys back and forth every forty minutes, the price of the trip, thirty cents each way. The city railroad was built in Poughkeepsie in 1870, but that was not extended to the college till the autumn of 1872. Before this date, however, the fare by omnibus had been reduced to ten cents, and was continued at this rate after the adoption of street cars.

Students under twenty had to have a chaperone, so it was, for some, quite an expensive journey, and most shopping trips were made by "clubbing," one student going for several. Until 1872, before their separation from the college classes, preparatory students went to town with a teacher.

Permission had to be obtained of Miss Lyman at her office hour Saturday morning and the name of the teacher given who had consented to accompany. A list also of purchases had to be submitted and left with her. The chaperone received this list, signed by Miss Lyman, with strict injunction not to permit any extension of the privilege given. "It teaches a girl to be systematic and exact in her accounts, and curtails trivial and foolish expenses. If she misses once to get some coveted article, she will be the quicker next time to remember." All excellent doctrine, but so disagreeable to the teachers to carry out that they combined to have the rule rescinded.

Taken from fifteen years as head of an English boarding school, what wonder that the family and social life at Vassar was formed by Miss Lyman—as we think now—on strict and narrow lines. Hardly a trace of the earliest regulations exists. The chaperone was once much in evidence. A girl was not allowed to go alone even to church without one, if under age. A young student that first year tells her experience the first communion Sunday. Miss Lyman gave her very cordial permission to attend the service, providing, as was customary, a teacher of the same denomination as escort. At the outset the teacher seemed unwilling to go to this particular church (Methodist), and when they entered made her charge sit far back by the door. Three times she ignored or refused a suggestion about going forward to the altar, and finally the student rose and started off down the aisle by herself. She wore a white sailor hat with long black ribbon streamers, and suddenly felt a quick jerk on these by the irate teacher in pursuit a few steps behind. "We knelt together at the altar," laughed the victim, "but you may fancy how much good the service did me."

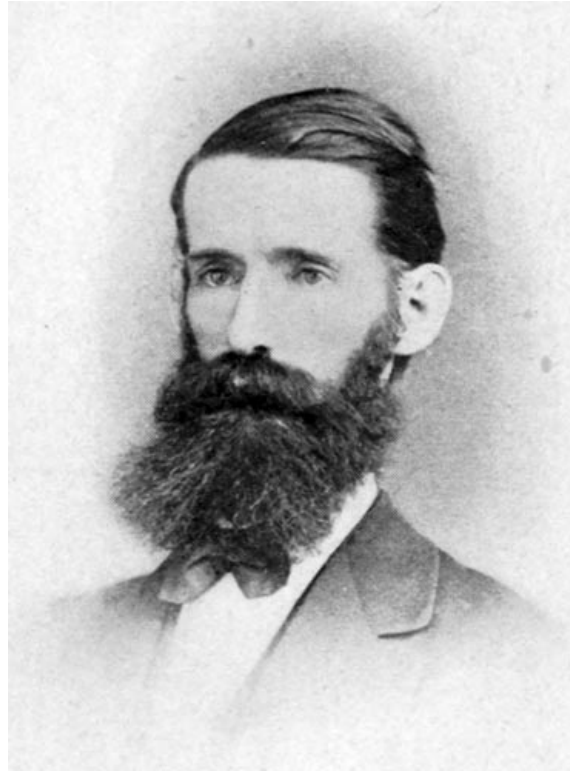
"What are your requisitions for a teacher?" Miss Lyman was often asked. Her reply was characteristic:—"First she must be a lady; second, she must be a Christian; third, she must have the faculty of imparting knowledge, and lastly, knowledge." "Why, Miss Lyman, would you consider being a lady the first essential of all?" "Most certainly. I know of good Christian women I should not, on account of their manners, like to place any girl under. Then, too, everybody knows that the finest teacher is not necessarily the best scholar. I have known many who had fine attainments, but were absolutely unfitted to impart knowledge to others."

A credulous young freshman was told by her roommates that Miss Lyman, if asked, would give out at morning prayers any hymn a student wished sung on her birthday, that it was her custom to do so. Not stopping to consider, the girl betakes herself to the lady principal's office and makes known her wish for the day soon approaching. Miss Lyman, perceiving the perfect good faith of the child, did not explain she had been made a victim of a hoax, but left that to the friends who had played the joke. Of course, the student was mortified. However, on the morning of her birthday, the hymn Miss Lyman gave out was the one asked for, and the girl never forgot the kindness that obliterated all chagrin.

Miss Lyman's tact was unailing in many other ways. A week or so after my arrival, I met her one morning coming out with a bundle of papers in her hand on her way to her regular appointment with Dr. Raymond at his office. She greeted me cordially, asked me how I was getting on in my work, and if I was comfortable in the room assigned me, adding, "I think you have never been in my office to see my window garden?" opening the door and ushering me in as she spoke. The flowers were really lovely, but more to me was the delightful friendly chat for five or ten minutes. Some time later a teacher high in authority asked me if I had ever had my official interview with Miss Lyman. "No, but I am expecting to be called up any day." "Are you sure? Have you never been to her office?" "Oh, yes, but not officially," and I related the window garden episode. Miss Clarke smiled. "How like her! She is apparently satisfied, then, for her only comment about you to me, because I had known you before coming here, was 'Do you think her Unitarian influence is likely in any way to be pernicious?'"

Among the many things outgrown at Vassar is mention of "Unitarian" with bated breath, as of something tabooed. It was a great bond with Miss Mitchell when she discovered religious preferences akin to her own, and she often admonished, "We must stand by our guns—must show our colors." You would not think, dear Vassar girl of to-day who can hear now unchallenged your own beloved minister of that denomination in chapel, that forty years ago he would not have been allowed to preach there?

On Sunday, morning and evening prayers were omitted. Bible classes at nine o'clock were held by professors and teachers in the recitation rooms, each corridor teacher having her own students in her class. The Bible teachers conducted their classes according to personal belief and opinion. Students had no choice whose class they should attend, but were assigned as seemed best to Miss Lyman. She herself taught the freshmen, and was said to be wonderfully interesting. Professor Farrar's class was very popular, and the teachers thronged to hear him. He was fresh from Elmira and Thomas K. Beecher, of whom in boldness and originality he was a worthy disciple. Professor Orton was also an interesting teacher of the Bible, but whatever keenness was employed to draw him out on the debatable questions of evolution, special creation and the like, he knew well how to set aside all discussion, and nobody ever heard his personal opinion. Pinned down for a statement of some kind, his invariable introduction would be, "It is said."



JAMES ORTON
1868

Chapel service was at eleven o'clock, the same as now, with preaching by the President. A voluntary religious service was held by direction of Dr. Raymond in the chapel in the afternoon, and there were voluntary prayer meetings in the evening.

Sermons on those infrequent Sundays when a stranger was invited to preach amused us by the delusion the minister labored under of the obligation to have a discourse suited to the audience on woman's sphere and duties. So many sermons on "Martha and Mary"—seven in one year, I believe—that we disgraced the college by broad smiles whenever the familiar allusion began or names were mentioned. If it was not Mary and Martha, it would be the conflict between science and religion that was next fitting, and science had a hard time of it with the lurid dangers of scepticism set forth in no uncertain terms. Professor Orton was exceedingly noncommittal on this subject, and close was the watch on him by those occupying neighboring chapel seats to see how he "took it." But no one ever did find out what the professor thought. He bore it all immovably without change of expression—not the faintest sign of interest betokened.

We observed in February the "Day of Prayer for Colleges." It was a sort of second Sunday and not to be evaded. The library—then removed to the fourth corridor—was opened awhile before the eleven o'clock service, after which the doors were opened again the half hour before dinner. The librarian once found to her horror that she had locked a student in, and began profound apologies for her careless oversight. "Oh, not at all, thank you very much! You see it was to-day or never with my moral philosophy topic—my last chance to get at the reference books,—so I didn't disclose myself when the door was about to be shut."

Communication with the outside world was—as we should think now, very restricted. There was no regular telegraph station at the college until 1873, but an operator came out for certain hours to send messages, none at all being allowed in the evening unless in great emergency. A special delivery messenger came from town in the evening, if you were so unfortunate as to receive a dispatch, and this, however insignificant, cost from one and a half dollars to three, depending on what was expended for livery hire to bring it out—as I happened to know to my indignant cost, more than once. The telephone had not been invented. The short day of the bicycle had not begun; electric cars and motors were a Mother Shipton prophecy still. All the electric devices so common now were hardly dreamed of.

For amusements there were base ball clubs, croquet clubs and a chess club with "never too late to mate" its motto. A bowling alley was in the basement of the museum; there was horseback riding, driving, with excursions,—river and country, as now. There was no basket ball, tennis or golf. Dancing in the gymnasium was frequent, and some receptions with dancing took place there. There was no prescribed physical culture as now, light calisthenics after Dr. Dio Lewis' methods sufficed. Trips to the Catskills and Lake Mohonk were in order, and in the Easter vacations extensive geological excursions were taken to various places of interest.

A students' paper,—*"The Vassariana,"* was established the first year, having one number only. In '67 the name was changed to the *"Vassar Transcript,"* and was continued as a yearly number in the same form till 1873, when the *"Miscellany"* began as a quarterly magazine. In 1878 it was altered to a monthly, nine numbers as we see it at present.

Noticed both in the *Vassariana* and *Transcript* we find the Floral Society, the Cecilia Society, the Exoteric (preparatory students debarred from the Philaethean and doing very clever work), and the Society of Religious Enquiry like the Y.W.C.A. of to-day.

Much was made of the Floral Society in the earliest days. It was recreation, exercise and profit combined. Hardly any member of the college family but lent support to it, either by contributions or active work. A capable English gardener was always on duty, and one particularly in the procession of these was a most interesting character. We all delighted to talk to him and to hear him say,—*"Ladies likes smilax for their 'air, it is so very light and hairy."* A tramp came through the pine-wood path into the garden one day and tried to beg. *"'E wanted fifty cents,"* said our man. *"I told 'im I 'adn't any money, and wouldn't be allowed to give 'im any if I 'ad. Besides, says I, there's my boss a-coming,"* pointing to Miss Braislin approaching from the opposite point of the circle. *"That your boss? Wal, before I'd have a woman for my boss,"* sneered the tramp as he hastily retreated. *"Some folks is so 'igh minded,"* commented H. placidly.

A student once asked him where he lived in England. He answered, *"About twenty miles from York, Miss, and I got up early one morning and walked the whole distance to see a man 'anged."* *"How could you!"* exclaimed the girl much shocked. *"Oh, I wanted to. 'E was a friend of mine. Yes,"* reflectively, *"I've seen two 'angings and the Centennial."*

One of the instructors had him at work over the window plants in her room one day during the visit of an old friend—a returned missionary—and sought to draw him out a little for her benefit, mentioning what was sure to start him, something about the *"Old Country,"* and that Mrs. — had just returned after several years' residence abroad. He snipped away at his plants unconcernedly, and without stopping his work inquired,—*"Did you 'appen to go to Hingland?"* She answered, *"Yes, but I was very unhappy there; I lost my husband in that country."* He turned instantly, surveying her comprehensively and compassionately, shaking his head slowly,—*"Oh! Oh! and so 'ard to get another."*

From the beginning there was musical talent of high order among the students, and their recitals and concerts were far above the common. The women entering those first years had, many of them, received the best the country afforded from childhood, and came far advanced in musical training, a few even with some little experience in playing in public, so that slow, patient growth was largely eliminated, and Professor Wiebe, the head of the department, had effective material at the start to work with. He was ably assisted by the best foreign teachers procurable, as well as by American teachers who had either studied abroad or under good German masters in this country. The concerts exclusively by the teachers or assisted by artist performers from the old Philharmonic Society were, then and for years following, events to be looked forward to. Professor Wiebe's specialty was singing. He had a delightful voice and method, and organized the "vocal club" of that time. Succeeding him in 1867, came Professor Ritter to be connected with the college till his death in 1891. His historical lectures and recitals were famous. He organized the Cecilia Society in 1869, and in his lifetime continued the custom of a commencement week concert given Monday night.



FREDERICK LOUIS RITTER
1867

Professor James Robert had succeeded Professor Knapp as the head of the classical department the second year, and lived with his young wife in the college family. Their pleasant rooms were on the fourth floor of the north wing, and were a favorite place of meeting. He was very musical in his tastes, reading at sight piano music and delighting in four-hand playing. A club of the music teachers met often in these rooms, having sometimes an evening of singing as well as of instrumental music. I remember at one of these meetings almost every number undertaken had been transposed into another key. We were groping our way to our respective rooms late after the lights were out. "Don't you live on this floor?" one of the party was asked. "No, an octave lower," she replied unconsciously, and wondered why we laughed.

The music department was very large, "ex-collegiate" being the excuse. The dependence of the family on the department for entertainment, as well as for sound instruction in musical culture, was something tremendous, and the fame of the college concerts and recitals went abroad in the land. It would make a history in itself—the work done in those days—the programmes undertaken and submitted, records of which are carefully preserved in the college archives.

Dr. Raymond was fond of music, though not in an especially cultivated sense, and urged Professor Robert to use the familiar parlors of the President's quarters for some of the impromptu musical evenings. The grand piano stood in the front parlor, where only the performers were allowed. The few admitted besides the President's family and club were in the back parlor; lights were turned down, absolute silence the order, as one would listen to a reading for education and instruction. All was strictly classical music—nothing else was tolerated or permitted.

Acquaintance with the best was the design, and the old composers were gone over till some familiarity with them was common in case of the audience. Pretty dry and dull the pianola and Victor lovers would think those evenings in these days, but all the musical machine devices have "come in" since that time. What if the President did occasionally go to sleep while we were performing, we had no pride in popular music to keep him awake. One evening Professor Robert announced that he would undertake to read at sight a little known sonata of Beethoven—a composition by its length and absence of strong "color" not usually played. It seemed endless to us music people, I remember, monotonous and wearisome. Dr. Raymond peacefully slept through the three quarters of an hour to our envy and approval. By and by Professor Robert finished and came out as the lights were revived to know what the chief thought. "Did you get into it at all, Mr. President?" he enquired eagerly. Dr. Raymond glanced a little ruefully at us, his companions in distress, then answered in his droll way, "Yes, I got into it all right—submerged, in fact." The appreciative laughter that followed, I fear Professor Robert never understood as we did.

In Mr. Vassar's lifetime his birthday was observed on the day of the week it fell, the inaugural celebration being on Monday, April 29, 1866. It was put on the Friday nearest the 29th in 1873. The invitations were sent out in the name of the students and the hour was five o'clock. The Vassariana of June that year, the first number of the first paper issued, gives account of the "celebration," as it was called then. The first eventful "Founder's" has passed into history, but it may not be familiar to you of to-day so the account will bear repeating. A triumphal arch of evergreens spanned the avenue at the lodge, and upon it were the words "Welcome to the Founder." At the left of this was the date of his birth, April 29, 1791; at the right, April 29, 1866.

The monogram V. C. was in the center, and over all, bright flags and banners. The entrance to the college was also decorated with flags and garlands of evergreen, and the chapel trimmed with wreaths of evergreen and bright flowers.

At six the students under direction of the Marshal and two aids marched on either side of the avenue to the lodge, forming a continuous line to the circle in front of the entrance. When the Founder's carriage appeared with him and President Raymond, it was greeted with wavings of handkerchiefs,—the college yell (shade of Miss Lyman!) being still unevolved. The lines turned instantly, marching back by the side of the carriage to the entrance where, in the vestibule, the Faculty and teachers were awaiting the procession. As the Founder went up the steps, the select band of singers stationed on the open porch sang the original song of welcome. Next, the officer of the day, Abby F. Goodsell of '69, was presented and escorted him to the chapel where the audience was waiting. As the Founder and escorts appeared at the chapel door, the organ, played by Professor Wiebe, began a triumphant peal, the audience rising and remaining standing till the party was seated. No one sat on the platform, but went up as occasion required. Prayer was offered by Dr. Raymond, then came piano music—a selection from "Der Freischütz"—by one of the solo performers of that time. A salutatory, or address of welcome as we say now, followed, after which came an original essay by one of the seniors which was followed by a song. This was preliminary to the principal part of the programme,—a series of recitations representing woman's social position in all ages, Swedish, Greek, Roman, Mediaeval, written or translated and adapted by those taking part, a modern selection from the "Princess" closing the recital. A brilliant musical duet for piano made way for a long original poem,—"A hilltop idyl," with local hits and description of the Faculty much appreciated. The closing lines were given with great effect,—

"And Vassar College stand through time
An honor to the Nation."

You smile? How I wish I could put before you the earnest spirit of that time, each one wide awake to the recognition of a great privilege, and trying with might and main to express it!

However, this was not all in honor of the day. There was a floral tribute,—Flora, her attendants and chief representative student—an original drama—very pretty and pleasing, and, I may add, proper. A hymn for the occasion,—"Our father and our friend," closed the students' programme. Old Hundred and the Doxology sung by every one present ended the chapel ceremonies, a collation in the dining-room followed and a reception in the college parlors finished the day.

The second anniversary in '67 was as elaborate in original material of song, address, poem and essay as the previous one, and was further distinguished by the unveiling of the marble bust of Mr. Vassar—the bust we see to-day in the college parlor. A drama was written by one of '68, with Muse of the Past, Genius of Progress and her attendants, Science, Art, Religion and Music. As the Genius of Progress alluded to Vassar College and spoke of the Founder she exclaimed, "Behold his features!" the signal for the curtain at the rear of the stage to be parted, revealing the bust against a background of evergreens. In '68, the last time Mr. Vassar was present, the chief event was an original cantata with music by Professor Ritter, entitled "The Crown of Life," proving later of especially beautiful significance.

The following year it was purely a memorial service, the invitations given out for this from three till seven. There was no reception, simply tea served in the dining-room after the exercises. It was a most beautiful and appropriate service with Larghetto from Beethoven's Second Symphony, played on the organ by Miss Finch; eulogy by Miss Mary W. Whitney, class of '68; the Second Movement of Schumann's Symphony in B flat arranged for four pianos; a memorial hymn written by one of the seniors, the music by Professor Ritter. So from the first to the last, it was the students' tribute to Mr. Vassar and their loving honors.

In 1870 the exercises were changed to the evening with George William Curtis as speaker, having also an original recitative and chorus with music by Professor Ritter, ending as usual with a collation and promenade concert. The programmes henceforth were far less elaborate, confined chiefly to some speaker of distinction, his theme being eulogistic of the man Vassar and what his gift had done for the education of women. This changed gradually to topics of general educational interest or to some question of public affairs. A debate was sometimes introduced, a Shakespeare reading, or an address by an alumna student. (Robert Collyer was the speaker in '72, Phillips Brooks in '73, Edward Everett Hale in '74, Colonel Higginson in '75.) Prayer was dropped from the programme in '74. No dancing appeared on the programme until 1878, and then four numbers only—lanciers alternating with quadrille. In 1895, the change was made to permit two affairs, literary exercises in the afternoon with the distinction they deserve, the evening given up to a reception with dancing.

The home of the Philaethean Society for many years—until the alumnae gymnasium was built—was society hall on the second floor of the museum building. Here were given union meetings to which were invited the whole college family. The weekly chapter meetings of Alpha, Beta and Delta were held in the largest recitation rooms of the college building.

The aim of Philaethea—which no one was allowed to forget—was distinctively literary culture, and it is marvelous what was accomplished, and what was the ambition still further to do. Dr. Raymond assisted in the organization of the society in 1865, and was its president for that year. The first public meeting was on Class Day evening the next June, the quaint form of invitation

reading,—“The pleasure of your company is invited to a literary entertainment.” The programme was nearly identical with that of Founder's Day, in prayer, music,—vocal and instrumental, and address of welcome followed by original song, poem, essays and drama. In this last figured Alethia, Goddess of Truth, and the Goddess of Discord, with the three Chapter representatives—Alpha, Beta and Delta. A chorus by the vocal club ended the chapel exercises and a collation and promenade concert took up the rest of the evening.

The anniversary meeting in December of that year was also elaborate, and the second part for the principal attraction of the evening presented an original colloquy,—“Representatives of European Nations.” This time we had recitations in costume of different European countries by thirteen students, each student writing her own part and setting forth the respective advantages of the country chosen. All came on the stage together, and as each finished her claim to superiority, she stepped back into pre-arranged effective position, making at the end a beautiful tableau when Europa entered, addressing her children, her closing words being, “Forever on towards perfect liberty.”

The December meeting gave a scene from Henry the Eighth, the only time anything approaching theatricals was seen on the chapel platform. In June the entertainment consisted of Shakespearean recitations—women of Shakespeare—nine characters being represented. The third anniversary meeting an original drama was given again—“The Undiscovered Sphere,” with the Spirit of Aspiration, the Spirit of Love, Vassar students and attendants.

There was uncommon literary talent in the society with ambition for a career in that direction, and some of the successful women authors of to-day tasted the first sweets of fame on the Vassar platform. “The Gospel according to Saint Matthew” appeared in '68, the unauthorized publication of a clever, fun-loving, brilliant student, to be quickly suppressed. It was a harmless enough production, but considered—as were all travesties—in questionable taste. Programmes were submitted to the Faculty the same as for Founder's up to 1874, but prayer was dropped in 1870.

Later the programmes were modified a good deal, but they never fell off in interest. Debates took the place of original dialogue and colloquy. Some of the subjects I recall—“Does the reviewer benefit literature?” “Has history a law of conquest?” “Are science and poetry antagonistic?” Then there were addresses by alumnae students, or else speakers from abroad chosen for some distinction in authorship. The first change from promenade concert after the literary exercises in chapel came at Founder's in 1878 when dancing was allowed,—lancers, quadrille and Virginia reel. It took till 1896 to establish round dancing and it was opposed even then.

The Founder was the first presiding officer of the branch of the Lyceum Bureau in Poughkeepsie in 1863, and Trustee Cyrus Swan its corresponding secretary. We heard those first years many distinguished Englishmen by this means—Gerald Massey, Wilkie Collins, Richard Proctor, Charles Kingsley,—and a few were afterwards secured by the college for the Friday evening lecture, Charles Kingsley among the number. He was exceedingly reserved, indifferent and hard to entertain. The only interest he showed was towards Miss Mitchell, whom he called upon at the observatory. “My wife would never forgive me if I came home without seeing Maria Mitchell.” Later came George Macdonald and his wife for a week with us. He was a charming guest, lecturer and preacher. The historian, Edward Freeman, gave a course of lectures, also Matthew Arnold's coming was an event in our life.

No general reception was held after any lecture, but members of the Faculty with a few especially invited teachers were occasionally asked to the lady principal's parlor where chocolate, coffee, little cakes or sandwiches were generally served. When asked if he would take some refreshment, Mr. Kingsley frankly mentioned that he would like a glass of beer. The situation might have been embarrassing had not Professor Backus come to the rescue and carried the guest off to his study for a pipe and chat and bottle of ale, ministering satisfactorily to Mr. Kingsley's wants.

It was either that same evening or when Freeman the historian stayed with us, that two teachers going by the guest room late after a little supper party, observed the great man's shoes outside the door. Knowing that no provision for this was then thought of, and that he would find his property exactly in the same condition the next morning, they softly stole near and carried off the shoes, polishing and returning them in fine shape, boasting ever after of the honor and privilege.

Almost every American author of note has been heard from our chapel platform. Wendell Phillips gave his lecture, “The Lost Arts,” at the college in 1872.

The rare privilege of seeing and hearing Ralph Waldo Emerson was also ours. He read his lecture and fumbled with his papers, meantime casting apprehensive glances to the faint far-away lights on the gallery side. “I am a student,” he began slowly, “and a lover of light.” The hint was speedily taken and silver candelabrum with blazing candles from the lady principal's parlor was quickly forthcoming.

In those days we knew the trustees very well, and their paternal interest in the venturesome experiment of the higher education of women was something akin to the Founder's. Fourteen of the twenty-eight on the original Board were residents of Poughkeepsie; seven of them had professions, seven were simply close business friends, including his two nephews, John Guy Vassar and Matthew Vassar, Jr. Some of these men were rather hard to persuade that so large a gift of money invested in this way was not in a perilous cause, but each lived to witness the beginning of Vassar's grand success and the Founder's triumph. Once when there was a question

of extension of the Christmas vacation and the Prudential Committee—as they were then called—had met to consider its advisability, one of them opposed the measure saying, "Pretty soon our patrons will be complaining that they don't get the worth of their money. We don't give them much over forty weeks of school now." Not one member of this first Board is living, the first break coming with the death in March, '69, of James Harper, senior member of the firm of Harper & Brothers.

Dr. Elias Magoon stands out vividly in my portrait gallery. Dear, kind, eccentric man! He looked, and we all thought him in his enthusiasm, mildly crazy, but we came to appreciate him and delight in his ardor. The college bought from him his whole private art collection of pictures, folios, books, armor, etc., to stock the Vassar gallery. The books—chiefly editions de luxe—were later transferred to the library proper, and it made the librarian sore at heart to discover how much Dr. Magoon had apparently read, pencil in hand, and how much patient work in eradication must result in consequence, impossible to accomplish wholly, as traces existing to-day testify.

Dr. Magoon was a lover and student of nature as well as of art. He was a frequent visitor at the college in the spring, coming from his Philadelphia home "just to get up at five o'clock in the morning for a tramp over Sunset Hill or around the lake to hear and see the birds." My table in the dining-room was near that of the Faculty, and it was a pleasure to see him come in to breakfast with face aglow from his walk, and to mark the interest and brightness he carried with him.

Now and then he gave us a talk in chapel. The frequent eight o'clock lecture was not quite so welcome always as it should have been, and when one evening at prayers it was announced that Dr. Magoon would talk on art at the usual hour, there were many reluctant feet hitherward. As we entered, he was already on the platform behind the desk, on which rested a huge bouquet of wax flowers. Of course attention was arrested, and as the last comer was seated he leaned over the flowers and gazing in mock adoring admiration began, "Now ain't that pooty?" A great wave of laughter went over the room, and if any one present had feared to be bored and grudged the hour from other duties, she forgot it all in the charm and delight of what followed this queer introduction. A hint of the true and beautiful in art, shown by contrast with ugliness that all could recognize, gave many of us our first wonderful lesson then and there.

Dr. Magoon and Miss Mitchell were warm friends in spite of difference in religious belief and opinions. She liked his unconventionalism and independence. They used to have great discussions, and he took very meekly her ratings for not being "more progressive." "But do me the justice to say I try," he would retort, and if he had occasion to write a note to her was fond of signing himself "your ever growing E. L. M."

Some curious letters were received at the college by Matthew Vassar, and his rage over one, I happened to witness. An untactful student, who had received the benefit of a full scholarship all through her course, conceived it to be her duty as soon as she graduated to remonstrate against the way the Founder had made his money, saying, "A college foundation which was laid in beer never will prosper." "Well, it was good beer, wasn't it?" shouted Mr. Vassar to his audience in the lower office. "I wonder where that girl would have got her education if it hadn't been for beer." Then the humor of it struck him and he laughed with us most heartily.

Among other queer letters received at the college, were requests to open correspondence "with view to marriage," the demand being for promising candidates to serve in the mission field. One such letter was addressed "To the Head Lady at Vassar." The writer was not backward about stating his requirements for his wife as home missionary. For one thing, she must be able to play the melodeon in church and to contribute the instrument also.

Perhaps this is as good an opportunity as any to tell the story of the bootjacks, about which so many conflicting statements have been made. After the Founder's death, a walnut tree on the Main Street premises had to be cut down, and Matthew Junior had a little sentiment about the use of the wood in some form for the rooms at college. Why he selected bootjacks nobody ever knew, but the lumber was sent to a factory in town to be made up in this fashion, and was distributed accordingly to the hilarious delight of all concerned.

Some friend in town chanced to remark to the Founder that the college parlors with only a few choice old engravings on the walls looked rather cold and bare; whereupon, in his eagerness to make good any deficiency, Mr. Vassar (without consulting anybody), betook himself to the leading photographer's in the city and bought the best he had in stock. The craze of the chromo was beginning, and several hundred dollars worth of these in most expensive frames were hung one evening as a grand surprise. The consternation and horror of Professor Van Ingen can be imagined, and the general amusement. However, the infliction had to be endured till after Mr. Vassar's death, and afterwards, there was Matthew Junior to be reckoned with and his sensitiveness to innovations. Professor Van Ingen was always on Founder's Day committee, and with much tactful diplomacy contrived to get consent to use the chromos in decorating the dining-room the second anniversary following. Here under a drapery of white tarletan with evergreen wreaths in profusion, the effect was really quite brilliant, and Mr. Vassar was much pleased. The art gallery was called upon to supply the places of the chromos taken from the parlor, and no one questioned that it was never convenient to change back. Gradually, in the wholesale kalsomining of walls in the summer vacations the offensive pictures disappeared, and portraits of trustees took their place.

Dr. Raymond's report at the end of the first year seems to have been printed in pamphlet form and issued to the world at large. Again press notices abound, all generally with appreciative comment.

The "Round Table," an ambitious weekly, 1863-1869, saw fit to be funny and I give a few paragraphs in illustration:

"We confess to an unfavorable impression by the style in which the Report is made. It is in bad taste, florid, turgid and pedantic. The author has written it on the back of Pegasus and the winged horse does not bound beneath him.... This modern system of female education has grown out of the miserable philosophic dogma of the mental equality of the sexes, the offspring of the combined weakness of the weaker sex and the greater weakness of the stronger sex. Woman is *not* the equal of man. She is immeasurably his superior.... In her appointed sphere woman walks a queen, but she claims neither the prerogatives of man nor the ability to use them. Drag not the young girl into the wide orbit of Jupiter, but lead her in the narrower and more befitting sphere in which moves the silvery car of Venus. Banish the barbarous curriculum proposed by your committee! Let not the time be ruinously spent in the attempt to master the dead languages, the higher mathematics, metaphysics, political economy and similar studies. The rudiments of these branches might be taught, but for them we would have no "chairs." The belles lettres department is the appropriate field for the well educated woman.... Having thus put out of the college door four out of the nine chairs—and very deferentially and respectfully we have done it—we have a word to say regarding the occupancy of the remaining ones. We strongly object to having *men* seated in them. The Report does indeed speak of lady assistants, but we insist on a reversal. The ladies should be the principals and the gentlemen the assistants. The proper educator of woman is woman. Vassar Female College is the sphere of Venus and no Jupiter has any business there. Who but Flora should preside in her own garden where the rosebuds and young lilies grow, inviting her choice still in their culture."

This is quite enough and unbelievable now, but absurd as it is, it voiced a large part of popular opinion then existing.

Another vexed question in the earliest days was that of health,—that women were unfitted to take the higher education and that their health would be undermined in consequence. The speakers on our commencement stage afforded convincing argument by their looks of the falsity of the argument. I remember hearing one June an enthusiastic person in the audience say of an "honor girl," of exceptionally attractive personality and vigorous health, as she left the platform,—"She had a capital essay and delivered it well, but if she had done nothing more than stand up there and let the people look at her for five or ten minutes, it would have paid, and buried this health discussion forever."

DR. AVERY.

Among those who contributed so much to the early life of the college and its success, the name of Alida C. Avery cannot afford to be overlooked. She came in 1865 as the resident physician, was a strong member of the Faculty, high in the confidence and trust of Dr. Raymond and Miss Lyman and sharing with them the responsibility of that important formative period. So close were the friendly and confidential relations among these three "powers that be"—hardly ever one appearing without the other—that some irreverent students dubbed them "The Trinity."



DR. ALIDA C. AVERY
1865

It was a good deal to organize and maintain such a department as hers in the face of popular opinion at that time, and I think much of her stiff professional etiquette resulted from the idea of upholding the equality of women physicians with men in the same calling, and being over sensitive to indifference and snubs. The early women pioneers in medical work did not find it a bed of roses, but they persevered. When the Boston Medical College for women was started in 1858, there was not a single graduated woman physician in the country. In 1863 there were two hundred and fifty.

Dr. Avery began her medical studies in 1857 at the Pennsylvania Medical College, and finished them at the New England Medical College in Boston, taking her degree from that institution. She seemed to take, in the practice of her profession, an antagonistic attitude as granted, and, indeed, she had much reason for doing so. None of us would have dared to approach her professionally out of her office hour, or to make the slightest personal wish as to treatment. She was as inflexible to her peers as to the students in her uncompromising adherence to discipline and hygienic regulations. Her seat at table was next to Miss Mitchell, who asked at dinner one day what to do for an inflamed eye. Without looking, the Doctor replied, "My office hour is at half past two." "Oh, come now," said Miss Mitchell, "you don't mean that you would make an old woman like me go way up to the fourth floor to your office hour?" The answer came same as before. "My office hour is at half past two," and that closed the incident.

To those who came to know her well she showed a lovable human side, a big heart, capable of most generous affection. She upheld the cause of woman as zealously even as Miss Mitchell, and their personal relations were most friendly and pleasant. She was passionately fond of flowers and an expert in their cultivation. Under her direction the Floral Society was established and the flower garden laid out and carried on.

Three years after Miss Lyman's death the Doctor resigned to go to practice her profession in Denver, later removing to California. With her death last September, and that of Professor Knapp quite recently, has gone the last one of that first Board of Faculty and Instruction, over forty years ago.

PROFESSOR BACKUS.

Truman J. Backus succeeded Henry B. Buckman as head of the English department in 1867, and for sixteen years held this position. It was said of him, "He is a born educator," and this was true. He had been educated for the ministry, but had never been ordained, and his first sermon was preached in the college chapel.



TRUMAN J. BACKUS
1867

He was only twenty-six years old when appointed to this post, had little or no experience, claiming only great enthusiasm and love for the work of his choice. If age has the courage of convictions, there is also the indispensable courage of youth. Unhampered by ruts of traditional methods of education, he dared to try experiments hazardous often in the estimation of his older, more conservative colleagues, and much of the progressive, far-seeing policy that insured the success of that early period is due in large measure to him. There were no smooth paths beaten out for safe walking in the higher education of women in the beginning of his career, and President Raymond relied a good deal for counsel and help on this youngest member of the Faculty, who was quick to see and quick to act. Professor Backus appreciated this trust, and always warmly acknowledged it.

He felt the restraint of constant association with others so much older than himself, and a certain whimsical humor would sometimes break out, defying all convention, putting him often in a place to be severely criticised, and which he rarely troubled himself to explain away.

He had a genius for discovering latent and unsuspected talent and the best work that one could do, and never grudged generous recognition when another overtopped him. He had a dislike for the obvious answer to the obvious question; liked to mystify, keep you in doubt as to his real opinion. An essay was once brought in at department meeting with great pride by one of the critics as especially clever, and far above the average in grace and felicity of diction. Perhaps the teacher showed too plainly her counting upon his approval, for he read the paper aloud, slowly, critically, without the faintest sign of appreciation, rather as if deadly bored. At the end, when her enthusiasm had ebbed and she supposed herself entirely mistaken, he remarked, "If I could write as well as that girl writes, I should be proud, and I would never do another stroke of teaching as long as I lived."

Interest was aroused by him in current topics, and I well remember one day in his English literature class, when walking up and down with head bent, as was his wont, listening to a brilliant recitation, he said to the student as she finished, "That is fine. Now can you name the three men most prominent to-day in the political life of this country?" She hesitated, faltered. "Can any one of you in the class?" Still silence. "How many of you are in the habit of reading carefully a daily newspaper?" No response. Then followed a lecture such as no one ever forgot and which prompted the formation of clubs which exist to-day. There were no dry bones of any subject he handled. He made it fresh, living, vital.

"I suppose these young women have some difficulty in keeping up to the high college grade?" said a visitor in classroom one day. "On the contrary," replied Professor Backus, "the students are the ones who make us all work hard to keep pace with *them*."

His knowledge of civic affairs led him often to be asked to stand as candidate for some desirable public office, to leave college for what promised higher promotion. "No, I have but one ambition, and that is to be a good teacher."

In 1872, he began giving an interesting course of lectures to the seniors and juniors on the national and political topics of the day. His Chaucer readings were very popular, and he gave several before the Literary Society of Poughkeepsie, awakening as much enthusiasm in his

crowded town audience, as among his students in Room J. It pleased him to get the many inquiries as to the best editions of Chaucer, and how to study this author, from those whose acquaintance with English literature had hitherto been very limited, and who he knew would never bring to the subject the love he did, or find in it the same beauties.

He took keen interest in the development of the Philalethean Society, and was one of the early speakers chosen to give the address at an anniversary meeting, having for his subject, "Evolution in the purpose of education." His lecture on Alexander Hamilton brought him into notice, and he was often called upon to give it in various places; but it was more his originality and power in the treatment of public questions that caused him to be invited far and wide, and to which invitation he oftenest responded. His Garfield eulogy was a most beautiful and fitting tribute with its eloquent, impressive close.

His hold on his old Vassar friends never weakened, as scores of loving testimonials after his death abundantly testify.

Into the dusk and snow
One fared on yesterday;
No man of us may know
By what mysterious way.
He had been comrade long;
We fain would hold him still;
But, though our will be strong,
There is a stronger will.
Beyond the solemn night
He will find morning-dream;
The summer's kindling light
Beyond the snow's chill gleam.
The clear, unfaltering eye,
The inalienable soul,
The calm, high energy,—
They will not fail the goal.
Large will be our content
If it be ours to go
One day the path he went
Into the dusk and snow.

PROFESSOR VAN INGEN.

Dear Professor Van Ingen! Why does everybody who knew him well say this at the mere mention of his name?

He was a Hollander who had come to this country in the studio of an artist friend in Rochester about the time the college was completed, and was the accepted candidate in 1865 for the art professorship. A clever artist; an inspiring teacher; a true gentleman; a good friend. Tennyson's lines once quoted of him express most nearly the common sentiment concerning him,—"One too wholly true to dream untruth."

He was here at the opening of the college, and made one of the resident (unmarried) members of the Faculty that year. In the summer vacation of 1866, he returned to Holland to be married, and brought his wife back with him.



HENRY VAN INGEN
1865

He had rooms in the north wing the first year of his coming, and used to relate in his characteristic quiet, humorous way many amusing anecdotes of that chaotic time. One I recall enjoying keenly. It was midwinter and intensely cold weather. His room was on the west side in the north wing, and one night the high wind and raging snow storm combined to make his quarters uninhabitable. Towards morning he could stand it no longer but got up and dressed himself, and putting on hat and overcoat thought he would spend the rest of the time before breakfast in the college parlors, trusting to find some heat in the registers. Making his way through the dark corridors two flights down, he reached the parlor, where in the dawning light he saw a group of students huddled close to the register that happened still to have comfortable warmth remaining. The experience of cold and discomfort in the students' rooms had matched his, so they had anticipated him in dressing and with shawls and cloaks were spending the rest of the night down stairs. He knew them all, had a cordial welcome, and the party began in subdued tones to talk and laugh and have a merry time. An hour, perhaps, went on this way, when a timid cough from the doorway arrested their attention. Winnie—Miss Lyman's maid—stood there. "If you please, Miss Lyman heard the voices in her room above, and sent me down to inquire what was the matter." The situation was explained briefly and the maid retired. With Miss Lyman's strict notions, how she was going to take this independence of action was the question, but they had begun to forget it when the jingling of spoons and cups heralded approach of Winnie a second time,—"Miss Lyman sends her compliments, and as you have been up so long, she had me make a little hot coffee for you which she hopes you may enjoy." There was a big tray with equipment of her own lovely china and silver service, and a heaped up plate of crackers, and this was all the notice the gracious lady ever took of the matter.

His studio and lecture room were in the old art-gallery on the fourth corridor and here, surrounded by his devoted disciples, he held sway. He had a large band of followers all his life here, and every one of them will testify he taught them more and higher than the art he loved so well.

Dr. Taylor in his remarks at the funeral service of Maria Mitchell said aptly that the word "genuineness" conveyed the truest impression of her. Transfer the same characterization to Henry Van Ingen, and you have the perfect expression also of the man.

Professor Van Ingen continued in the service of the college for thirty-six years, or until his death in November, 1898.

"He scarce had need to doff his pride or slough the dross of earth;
E'en as he trod that day to God, so walked he from his birth,
In simpleness and gentleness and honor and clean mirth."

PROFESSOR MITCHELL.

It was a privilege to know her, and the highest praise one could have would be that Maria Mitchell called her—friend.

The outline facts of Maria Mitchell's life, written by her sister, Mrs. Kendall, together with selections from journals and letters appeared in 1896, and leave nothing to be desired further in that direction. But everybody who knew her at Vassar finds in that record much left out of the dear, delightful, original, human side, and it is impossible to live over the portion of time spent here with her without putting into these random recollections some hitherto unpublished fragments about her. I trust she will forgive me.

Some old lines always expressed her to me,—“A soul that scorns the vain, holding the world but at its due;” and, “Who saw life steadily and saw it whole.” How one wanted to peep in that notebook of hers—usually carried in her pocket. An abstruse calculation jotted hastily down on one page, side by side with the latest anecdote or joke, a fact in regard to woman's education, an intimate personal reflection,—what a mine of riches it contained!

“If thee has any secrets, thee musn't tell them to Maria. She never could keep one,” said dear old Mr. Mitchell, playfully. We understood what he meant. While she would not reveal special confidence reposed in her, or give out in advance any college matter of importance, she simply was unable to bind herself to the petty and the trivial, and as a friend stated, “thought and word with her came pretty close together.”

However interested you might have been in woman suffrage and all the other subjects concerning the “cause,” you felt that in comparison with this grand woman you hardly knew the alphabet. She judged everything from the standpoint, “How is this going to affect women?” I remember her indignation at being overlooked with the other two women of the Faculty by President Raymond in his demand for a list of what the members had published. “We may not have done so much as some of the men, but we all have done something.” It took a good deal of apology on his part to soothe her wounded feeling and restore her natural good humor.



MARIA MITCHELL
1865

Every woman speaker of note in that day,—Julia Ward Howe, Anna Dickinson, Mary Livermore, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ednah D. Cheney, were personal friends of Miss Mitchell, and at various times her guests at the observatory. Sometimes one would be invited to speak before the whole college, as when Mrs. Howe recited there her Battle Hymn of the Republic and Mrs. Livermore told the story of her war experiences in a hospital. But the observatory was chiefly the place of meeting, with spirited talk and free discussion. What delightful evenings were there when a favored few were asked to meet distinguished guests! What personal anecdote and reminiscence! And what good coffee at the end!

She avoided irritating discussion and heated argument. Two friends of hers had cause of dispute, and as it happened one day in her presence the pros and cons of the case were being gone over pretty vigorously. Suddenly she interfered,—“This subject is never to be alluded to again—pause—twinkle—unless I bring it up myself.”

The earliest reports of departments were read in detail at Board meetings, and Miss Mitchell had a satisfaction that her labor in making out statistics had not been wasted—seeming, then, to count in significance and importance. In later years, this proceeding was no longer practicable. Entering the President's office one morning she inquired a little aggressively,—“Into the oblivion

of whose hands do I consign this paper?" "Mine," came the meek reply, disarming her completely.

I came upon her one day comparing with vexed expression her watch with the lodge clock:—"Better no clock there at all than one always a little wrong." "But why do you mind? You are not to blame—have nothing to do with it." She turned quickly, her eyes flashing,—“How would you like to hear bad English used persistently in your class all the time in spite of yourself? This clock affects me the same way!"

Once as her associate teacher left the room where we were sitting in the observatory, Miss Mitchell looked after her lovingly,—“Mary Whitney is perfection, but she has one fault. She doesn't always shut the door behind her."

She appreciated gifts of flowers, and trifles that she could share, but once refused a lovely vase to stand on her study table,—“I should have to dust it." Hearing her speak of wishing to see a volume of essays by John Weiss, the book was purchased and carried over to her. Later she returned it with thanks,—“I have read this with much enjoyment. Now take it home and keep it. I do not want to accumulate things—too much trouble when I come to break up."

It was the day of illuminated texts and mottoes. Miss Mitchell had no fancy for these, yet in her neat hand-printing is this on a card to slip under a paper-weight—still a prized possession,—“Disce ut semper victurus; Vive ut cras moriturus." In her free translation it read,—“Study as if you were going to live forever; live as if you were going to die to-morrow." She was much amused to be told of a serious minded student who had decorated her room profusely with Scripture texts, and without the slightest sense of humor had placed on her wardrobe door a conspicuous "Seek and ye shall find." "Most likely not find," commented Miss Mitchell drily.

Concerning charitable work among so-called "fallen women," her attitude seemed rather cold and unforgiving in contrast to her well known views. "I can pity, forgive and help, but I want to let them alone. I don't like things that have been dragged through the mud."

Her standards were merciless. "Middlemarch" was, in her opinion, an immoral book;—"Dorothea had no business to have had even a feeling of interest in Ladislaw. What if it did go no further, you say? She was a married woman." That settled it. And yet, Miss Mitchell admired George Eliot and condoned her marriage with Lewes, as a woman too grand intellectually to be subject to the petty verdict of the world's opinion. She would not relish the "problem" novel of to-day, and the aggressive methods of the modern suffragette would receive scant toleration.

There is a characteristic story of her appearing at the open window of an inside bedroom, and making a friend for life of the startled occupant by exclaiming of a little sketch in color just finished and hung on the wardrobe door to dry,—“Why, this is — a man in science. I know him well. Excellent. Who did this? You?" Another time when the sunset was more brilliant than common, she would knock on all the doors of the corridor she was passing through, to call out any one who otherwise would miss the spectacle. Homesick "new girls" on the well known first north transverse rejoiced in her, and blessed her for want of ceremony in rapping on their doors nearly every day the first week or two with the cheery inquiry, "How are you getting on?" and "Can I help you in any way?"

How she loved children! And they all loved her. Noticing the little son of one of the professors gathering daisies in the field near the observatory one afternoon, she called to him,—“You may go into my garden and pick some flowers there, but be sure not to take any of the roses." When the delighted child appeared to her later, she saw to her great surprise his arms filled with them. "Didn't I say you were not to pick my roses?" "Didn't know they were roses," said the boy innocently, amusing her greatly. "It takes a little five year old to crawl out of a tight place."

Miss Mitchell disliked form, the silent grace at table being even a little objectionable to her. "I wonder what they all say when they put their heads down? As for me"—and her eyes gleamed with fun—"I have just time to say one line of 'The spacious firmament on high.'"

We went out to dinner one Sunday together. She asked me beforehand what time I had ordered the carriage to bring us home. I named the hour. "Put it an hour earlier. I shall enjoy every moment up to that time, but I am afraid I cannot be polite any longer."

Certain phrases amused her and she could be very funny over two particularly,—“the first step in female education," and the "scheme of salvation,"—"so very schemey" she would repeat.

"What name are you going to give this precious club of radicals?" "Why, you have just given me the idea—have named it yourself—the radicals," a title which abbreviated to Rads was adopted at once.

There were only four or five of us outside of the students who had Unitarian preferences, and we were considered on account of this, by our orthodox sisters, to be indeed very black sheep religiously. The club was very informal, meeting every Sunday evening for supper at the observatory, or in the room of a member, entertaining in this way any guest visiting the college that Miss Mitchell considered in sympathy enough to invite. The aim was serious, excluding all gossip and light talk, and while there was no straining after "high thinking," it was certain we had frequent hint of this in Miss Mitchell's independent, stimulating opinions, and from the friends who came as guests, bringing their best thoughts with them.

"No matter what we resolve to talk about," she said laughingly, "we always seem to end up with

the immortality of the soul." This subject had a fascination for her and she was fond of getting "views" as she called it from persons she valued. Once on a visit to Whittier, she asked him if he had any doubts of a future life. He seemed amusedly incredulous there could be any. "But *I* am not at all sure in *my* mind," returned Miss Mitchell. He looked at her and answered slowly,— "The idea of Maria Mitchell's being snuffed out!" and would pursue the theme no further.

How often she used to say,— "If I only had your happy ideas about the hereafter!"

"A matter of good digestion merely."

"And did you never lie awake in terror of hell?"

"Never!" emphatically.

"Well, when I was a girl sixteen I often did, afraid of being 'a lost soul forever'—such was the doctrine I heard preached in my childhood." I tried rallying her a little, saying she was proud of her doubts as belonging to one who thought deeper—was of keener intellectual fibre—but I made no impression. What she felt was sincere. She never posed.

She had a deeply religious nature; had no sympathy with free thinking—so called—or scientific speculations, flippant and irreverent. And how quickly she responded to what was noble and uplifting in any service! I had the privilege of spending a week in New York with her one Easter vacation and going with her to hear O. B. Frothingham preach. We had never heard him, and anticipated a coldly brilliant, intellectual discourse such as he had the reputation of giving. I still hear his calm clear voice in his invocation,— "Let us come into Thy presence this morning, forgetting all bitter memories of the past; the cares, anxieties and trials of the present; the gloomy forebodings of the future; and ascend with Thee into that higher realm where the sun is always shining, where the truth holds on forever, and where love—never wanes." Miss Mitchell was much moved. She leaned forward to me,— "I am full fed now,—could go home this minute."

A conundrum was given out,— "What is the way to slip into Heaven easy?" Miss Mitchell protested, sure that the answer must be something denominational or Calvinistic. On hearing the answer,— "Make frequent use of the church *ie*," she exclaimed quickly, "Oh, that's Episcopal! The orthodox people think it is no matter what you *do* if you only *think* right; the Unitarians think it is no matter what you *believe* if you only *do* right; and the Episcopalians think it is no matter what you do or what you believe if you only go to church."

The Faculty table in the dining-room was also for students' guests, no separate table then. Miss Mitchell often came in late and tired, resenting, as she put it, "to be polite." One day she came in to dinner to find a warm student friend there with a young man as her guest. As he had been placed by Miss Mitchell, he endeavored to enter into conversation with her, introduced by the student, receiving for his pains very scant courtesy and notice. Suddenly some remark he made to his student friend arrested her attention. She turned to him, "Young man, I did not catch your name." "Chadwick." The student spoke then,— "Reverend Doctor Chadwick, Miss Mitchell. You remember you told me to bring him over to the observatory, when he should come?" But he had a royal welcome and visit later. She knew his writings, had a warm admiration for him and made ample amends for his first cold reception.

She disliked extremely to have attention called to anything out of order in her dress, and the person who innocently ventured to tell her was sure to get pungent reproof. Once as she stood in the college office by the counter waiting for the mail, a teacher passing, unaware of this peculiarity, picked off with a good deal of manner and great unnecessary deliberation a long white thread from Miss Mitchell's grey shawl. "Please put that back just where you took it from! I consider it an impertinence!"

She had to accept, though, and laugh in spite of herself, at her predicament in Main Street one afternoon. Forty years ago a leghorn bonnet was not a thing to be treated lightly and thrown aside at the end of a season, but reappeared, year after year, to be bleached, pressed and rejuvenated generally. Miss Mitchell was taking one of this sort to her milliner, swinging carelessly the huge paper bag in which the denuded bonnet reposed. Suddenly her name was called several times, and turning she was aware of a fastidious little old gentleman of her acquaintance, his own hat in one hand and her unsightly headgear in the other, bowing before her, breathless in his pursuit,— "Miss Mitchell, when you alighted from the street car back there, I happened to be passing just as this dropped out of your bag," presenting, as he spoke, the unfortunate bonnet of whose loss she had been entirely unaware. The courtly grace of his action amused her immensely, and she delighted to tell this story often.

She had many other stories against herself that she liked to tell. One was of being on an ocean steamer and hearing a man among a group of passengers near say,— "Maria Mitchell, daughter of General O. M. Mitchell, the astronomer, is on board." Attention being called to her proximity, and that it was thought she belonged to another branch of the name, he crossed over to Miss Mitchell's chair, and put the question to her direct. She answered quietly,— "No, my father is William Mitchell of Nantucket. He is also an astronomer." "All the same," she heard him say in a low tone as he regained his party, "I can't help what she says, but Maria Mitchell, the astronomer, *is* the daughter of General Mitchell of Ohio."

Again she was on a steamer bound for Nantucket, and as the passage was rough, was lying half asleep on a couch in the ladies' cabin. Two women belonging to Nantucket were chatting

together in the farthest corner of the room, and she suddenly became faintly conscious that she was the subject of their conversation. "I suppose Maria Mitchell has done some pretty big things—people say so—but she is awful homely!" "Well, yes," hesitated the other, "I s'pose she is, but you must admit she has fine eyes."

She shared a cottage one summer with Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett, whom she much admired and liked, though no greater contrast can be imagined than existed between the two women in temperament and tastes. Some of Miss Mitchell's college girls paid her a visit there one day, and she got Mrs. Burnett's permission to introduce the students to her. They had a delightful call in her room, made beautiful with antique furniture, pictures, rugs, cushions—everything that could appeal to cultivated eyes and aesthetic sense. Returning with them to her own quarters across the hall from the author's suite, Miss Mitchell waved her hand to the room just left:—"Girls, that is Paris, and this," ushering them into her rather bare parlor, "this is—Cape Cod."

How fond she was of a good story! She always rejoiced in a fresh anecdote, and made you feel her debtor by contributing one. One Monday the Rev. Dr. Charles Robinson dined with a few of us at Miss Mitchell's private table, having been at the college over Sunday. He was a famous story-teller, and she challenged him to tell more in three minutes than she could. He began instantly in all seriousness a breathless string of nonsense rhymes and couplets after this style,—"The—bell—rings—when—it—is—tolled—but—the—organ—says —I'll—be—blowed—first—Mary—had—a—little—lamb—its—fleas— were—white—as—snow—how—can—that—be—since—fleas—you—know— are—black—as—any—crow—" and so on till his time was up. He won, for Miss Mitchell was laughing—as we all were—and unable to go on with the contest.

Her humor and quickness at repartee—"capping"—she called it, showed in her last illness, even when articulation was difficult and her words hardly understandable. Her sister, Mrs. Kendall, came in one morning and stood by the bedside with cheerful greeting, "Thee looks well this morning, Maria." In a flash, the invalid responded brokenly and weakly,—"*My—face—is—my—fortune,*" "*sir—she said,*" finished Mrs. Kendall for her.

Her unexpectedness was delightful, if often a little embarrassing. One never could predict what she would do next. She would beckon a teacher in passing out of the dining-room to stop at the Faculty table, and before those assembled there, ask her some question such as,—"*Have you a silk dress? And how many?*" "There!" dejectedly. "I was afraid you had! It was said at this table just now that not a teacher in the college but had a silk dress. I said I didn't believe it, that there must be somebody here that couldn't afford one," adding in friendly dismissal, "Well, I'm glad you have one." Another time she called out, "I hear you are engaged to be married. I denied the report, as you had not told me first." The teacher, used to Miss Mitchell's way, showed no confusion, carried out the joke by saying, "I have hardly had a chance to tell you yet," and laughingly made her escape. A student who had just entered college met her shortly after arrival. Miss Mitchell stopped her. "You have a dimple in your chin. Well, so has George William Curtis, but still it is a deformity."

Another time to an officer whose parents had visited her at the college came this:—"Such a handsome father and mother as you've got! Aren't *any* of you children good looking?" One rarely felt aggrieved at Miss Mitchell's bluntness. It was her "way." She was a privileged person, and most of us were ready to share the laugh she raised at our expense.

Her "Dome" parties for her students at the end of the year were famous, and she was busy weeks beforehand composing her "poetry" for the occasion. She had a natural gift in impromptu rhyming, and what was bestowed on her girls was treasured years after. Two of these precious relics of the past have been loaned to me to copy here. It is most fitting that the last words of this sketch should be her own, and lingeringly with them I leave her.

A "Dome" rhyme to her girls:—

"Who lifting their hearts to the heavenly blue
Will do woman's work for the good and true;
And as sisters or daughters or mothers or wives
Will take the starlight into their lives."

In the train with three of her seniors after Commencement, June 30th, 1868:—

"Sarah, Mary, Louise and I
Have come to the cross roads to say good-bye;
Bathed in tears and covered with dust,
We say good-bye, because we must;
A circle of lovers, a knot of peers,
They in their youth and I in my years,
Willing to bear the parting and pain,
Believing we all shall meet again;
That if God is God and truth is truth,
We shall meet again and all in youth."

To live in a great period is rarely to be conscious of its magnitude and importance. It is not till

you stand from afar that the wonder grows on you, with thankfulness to have been a looker-on and to have served somewhat, if ever in so humble a capacity.

The days that are no more! But this is not said regretfully, for if Vassar stood for glorious promise from the beginning, it has been splendidly fulfilled in the march of years. They have slipped along, bringing "golden opportunity" in greater measure, continually broadening attainment, ever clearer and higher vision.



1865

Transcriber's Note:

Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EARLIEST YEARS AT VASSAR: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS ***

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