

TO EMILY DAVIES, 8 AUGUST 1868

GHL was at Oxford for the meeting of the British Medical Association, invited by H. W. Acland, Regius Professor of Medicine, who presided. He had pleasant rooms in Magdalen College and among the doctors found warm welcome for his physiological work. GE was never convinced of the need for equality of the sexes, though she insisted on equal education. In a letter to H. R. Tomkinson Miss Davies wrote: "I will try to be respectful to parents, but how is it possible to describe College life without showing how infinitely pleasanter it will be than home?" [iv, 467-68]

[The Priory]

August 8 1868.

You must have numbered me yesterday among the women of the 'glittering eye' and excited demeanour. Not liking that sort of identification I want to tell you that I had all the morning been mentally agitated and in bodily pain, and that I was additionally restless in the prospect of Mr. Lewes' return. The pleasure of a visit from you made me thrust away all that pre-occupation, but I was not very successful, and I fear I talked on serious subjects in a sadly flurried imperfect way, which makes me feel guilty. Ineffectual rash talk is an offence, only not so bad as ineffectual rash writing. Pray consider the pen drawn through all the words and only retain certain points for your deeper consideration, as a background to all you may judge it expedient to say to your special public.

1. The physical and physiological differences between women and men. On the one hand, these may be said to lie on the surface and be palpable to every impartial person with common sense who looks at a large assembly made up of both sexes. But on the other hand the differences are deep roots of psychological development, and their influences can be fully traced by careful well-instructed thought. Apart from the question of sex, and only for the sake of illuminating it, take the mode in which some comparatively external physical characteristics such as quality of skin, or relative muscular power among boys, will enter into the determination of the ultimate nature, the *proportion* of feeling and all mental action, in the given individual. This is the deepest and subtlest sort of education that life gives.

2. The spiritual wealth acquired for mankind by the difference of function founded on the other, primary difference; and the preparation that lies in woman's peculiar constitution for a special moral influence. In the face of all wrongs, mistakes, and failures, history has demonstrated that gain. And there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be 'unsexed.' We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character, than we can afford to part with the human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman—which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history.

The answer to those alarms of men about education is, to admit fully that the mutual delight of the sexes in each other must enter into the perfection of life, but to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgment may be as far as possible the same. The domestic misery, the evil education of the children that come from the presupposition that women must be kept ignorant and superstitious, are patent enough. But on that matter your know quite as much as I do.

I have it on my conscience that I did not make a little protest against something that fell from you about 'the family' and also about the hurrying industrial view of life that infects us all in these days—but I should never have done, and I am not well. Come again, when you can, if I did not weary you.