

## DOMESTIC ECONOMY: THE WHOLE DUTY OF WOMAN

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In the burgeoning industrialism of the nineteenth century the American man turned his nation into one huge counting-house and moved the family from the hearth to the factory. But he did not leave the hearth unattended. He left woman there, as guardian, on her pedestal, a sacrifice to the household gods and an assurance to himself and the nation that the values of the past were indeed not lost. The proper sphere of woman was to be mother and wife, pious, pure, submissive and domestic. She was the preserver of religious values, the keeper of virtue, the moral support of her husband, and the guardian of the home. This was the True Woman.<sup>1</sup> This was the Victorian Ideal. Yet, like Rome, it was not built in a day. It was, in fact, formulated almost consciously in eighteenth century America.

Changes in the family, church, community and economy of the late eighteenth century brought America face to face with a need to formalize education lest the ideal of learning inherited from the forefathers be lost completely. Most of the schemes for national systems of education advocated by our major statesmen did not materialize. However, American education, as it emerged from the colonial period, proved itself an agent of social change and distinctively shaped the American personality.<sup>2</sup>

This was particularly true in the area of women's education. Americans of the late eighteenth century became engrossed in the question of education for the "Daughters of Columbia" and their equal capacity with boys for learning. The number of schools and academies for girls increased, with

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, XVIII (Summer, 1966), 151-174.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Formation of American Society* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972), p. 48.

Philadelphia and New England taking the lead in this new endeavor. At the Yale commencement of 1773 two graduates debated "Whether the Education of Daughters be not without any just Reason more neglected than that of Sons?" One of the standard topics of Ezra Stiles' debate class was "Whether women ought to be admitted to partake in civil Government Dominion and Sovereignty." In 1782 the topic for debate was whether female academies would be beneficial to society.<sup>3</sup>

Writings on women, their status and education became more frequent, many of them pleading for "equality" of men and women in intellectual ability. Authors of these writings laid the blame for the low status of women at the feet of a deplorable educational system. Women were too much admired for their personal accomplishments only, leading them to be frivolous and superficial. Further, the authors warned against ostentatious dress and behavior, cautioned against novel reading and frivolous literature, and called for modesty and reserve in women. Women should be accomplished in the social arena, but they should also be useful creatures, and know well how to provide for the family and run a household efficiently. With better education women would be better companions for their husbands, and better mothers, especially for their sons. Women were the moral guardians for men in particular and for society in general.

Numerous are the writers who declared women the intellectual equal of men. James Armstrong Neal declared women capable of "all learning, of sounding the most profound depths, and of attaining to the most sublime excellence in every part of science." If anyone held an opinion to the contrary, he said, it was simply the "gloomy exotic of a degenerate mind . . . the spurious offspring of perverse ignorance."<sup>4</sup> Readers were fre-

<sup>3</sup> Mary Benson, *Women in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> James Armstrong Neal, *An Essay on the Education and Genius of the Female Sex* (Philadelphia, 1795). To which is added an account of the commencement of the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia, December 18, 1794. This work also includes an address by Mr. Poor, the principal, Mr. Swanwick's address, the salutatory address by Miss Ann Harker and the valedictory by another girl.

quently urged to observe small children before their education began. At that point, these writers said, if there is a difference it is "certainly in favor of the girls."<sup>5</sup> Hannah Moore compared the defective education of females to the binding of feet done by the Chinese: "We have no just ground for pronouncing that their understanding has already reached its highest attainable point than the Chinese should have for affirming that their women have attained the greatest possible perfection in walking while the first care is, during their infancy, to cripple their feet."<sup>6</sup>

The radical cause of the degradation of the female was without question the "error in education."<sup>7</sup> Or as *The Lady's Magazine* pointed out: "At fourteen a boy begins to get some advantages over a girl, and he continues to improve by means of education. He has all the fountains of knowledge opened to him. His talents are always on the stretch."<sup>8</sup> Not only were women deprived of a proper education, an informal education was even denied them, since, as Richardson and Neal point out, anything that verged on intellectual discussion was postponed until women left the room, "their retreat serving as a signal for the exercise of intellect."<sup>9</sup>

These writers portray the young women of the time as

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<sup>5</sup> John Burton, *Female Education and Manners*, Third edition (New York, 1794). The London Edition of this book has been republished by Source Book Press, New York, 1970.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Moore, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Two volumes (Philadelphia, 1800). Moore was an Englishwoman much published and read in the United States on this topic.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Branagan, *Excellency of the Female Character Vindicated* (New York, 1807). See also, *The Lady's Magazine*, Vol. I (June, 1792–May, 1793), published in Philadelphia. "Thoughts on Woman" by a Celebrated Writer, p. 111, and Mary H. Pilkington, *A Mirror of the Female Sex* (Hartford, 1799).

<sup>8</sup> *The Lady's Magazine*, p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Richardson, *The Young Ladies' Selection of Elegant Extracts from the Writings of Illustrious Females* (Boston, 1811). "Hints Respecting the Conversation of Ladies." Neal states: "Women are generally excluded from the discussion of subjects, calculated to strengthen and expand the mind . . . They are thought incapable . . . and thus are excluded from the attempt." *Essay on Education*.

frivolous giddy girls, given to ostentation in dress, affectation of manners, preoccupation with personal beauty, and time consuming perusal of romantic novels which instilled in them superficial values, if they did not lead them outright astray. Charles Peirce warned them: "You need more than beauty. If you're pretty with nothing in your head, you are miserable to everyone."<sup>10</sup> Hannah Moore admitted greater initial sophistication in girls who "devour frivolous books," but they would end "thinking and acting like children." The discipline of severe studies would make the young woman wise without vanity, teach her to avoid affectation, especially in "learning and authorship."<sup>11</sup> Novels such as *Pamela* could only serve to lead girls astray morally and should be checked, as should the universal fashion of wearing hoops, "a growing evil" as described by *The Lady's Magazine*.<sup>12</sup> Some, like Benjamin Rush, blamed men for such a situation. "The invention of ridiculous and expensive fashion in female dress" is done by the gentlemen, "in order to divert the ladies from improving their minds."<sup>13</sup>

If, indeed, all this was true of the women of the eighteenth century, what did they suggest women be taught? Women should learn to be pious and pure. Modesty or female reserve was a frequent lesson in the sermons, monitors, instructors and pocket libraries published at this time. The woman of the Book of Proverbs was the example to emulate. Piety, or fear of the Lord, was a "very essential qualification"<sup>14</sup> and with it modesty which "supplies many defects," a virtue which "exhibits a beautiful combination of the excellent and amiable graces in women."<sup>15</sup> Even those who furthered equal-

<sup>10</sup> Charles Peirce, *Portsmouth Miscellany* (Portsmouth, 1804).

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Moore, *Strictures* Vol. I, Chapter VI; Vol. II, Chapter I. See also *The New Pleasing Instructor* (Boston, 1799). "Cautionary Hints to Young Ladies," p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> *The Lady's Magazine*, p. 254. See also *A Treatise on Dress* (New Haven, 1783).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education* (Philadelphia, 1787).

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Bell, *The Character of a Virtuous Woman Delineated in Proverbs* (New London, 1794).

<sup>15</sup> Amos Chase, *On Female Excellence* (Litchfield, 1792).

ity of the sexes expected modesty and reserve in women. *The New Pleasing Instructor*, and every young girl's book like it, included a chapter on this female virtue. Burton captured the sentiment of most of them: "Modesty is a female virtue and is as congenial to your Sex as Courage is to the other. . . . A Blush is a female grace; and . . . to suppress it would deprive you of one of your most agreeable attractions."<sup>16</sup> Even the young lady who gave the Salutatory Oration at the Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia admitted that "modesty, distinguished from affected delicacy, will give a lustre to our endowments."<sup>17</sup> Or as William Kenrick said pointedly: "Shame shall overtake her who has forgotten how to blush."<sup>18</sup>

Women were considered moral guardians of society and of men particularly. A "Daughter of America" invited all women to wage war against the greatest of all enemies in this country, SIN. Even though the men might not engage in this battle, this should not hinder women from going forward in their spiritual warfare.<sup>19</sup> *The Lady's Pocket Library* told young women that "the prevailing manners of an age depend more . . . on the conduct of women," and that women would do well to reflect how great an influence female morals must also have on men's conduct. "How much it is to be regretted that the ladies should sit down contented to polish, when they are able to reform."<sup>20</sup>

The quality of paramount importance was domesticity; women should be useful especially in the home. William Kenrick's oft published classic *The Whole Duty of Woman*, told them to "let wise men and the counsellors enact laws and correct them. . . . Thy kingdom is thy own house and thy government the care of thy own family."<sup>21</sup> Hannah

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16 John Burton, *Female Education and Manners*, Vol. I, p. 212.

17 Ann Harker, "The Salutatory Oration," in James A. Neal, *An Essay on the Education and Genius of the Female Sex* (Philadelphia, 1795).

18 William Kenrick, *The Whole Duty of Woman* (Boston, 1761).

19 A Daughter of America, *Women Invited to War* (Boston, 1787).

20 "On Dissipation," in *The Lady's Pocket Library* (Philadelphia, 1794).

21 Kenrick, *The Whole Duty of Woman*.

Moore recommended a course of studies that would not bring women "celebrity" but would improve women's usefulness. It would make them "good daughters, good wives, good mistresses, good members of society and good Christians."<sup>22</sup> John Hamilton Moore suggested that women should be educated because they have more spare time on their hands, lead a more sedentary life, and seem to have a greater gift of speech, a *copia verborum*, which should be put to some use. "If the female tongue will be in motion, why should it not be set right."<sup>23</sup>

Woman was destined from the beginning to be helper to man, and it was in the interest of man to choose a woman who could truly be a companion, one whose mind was trained in intellectual excellence rather than only her body in external beauty. Only then could there be any prospect of enduring friendship, any happiness in the married state.<sup>24</sup> Some men, it seemed, felt that they could retain their superiority by selecting a companion for life "from the class of the ignorant and untaught." Only "the accomplished, the liberally accomplished female," Murray retorted, "will be regarded as a pleasing and instructive companion."<sup>25</sup>

Adjunct to this position was women's role as mothers. Women, these writers argued, were entrusted with the early education of their children. As such, they were entrusted not only with the care of daughters, but also with forming the minds of future men. A suitable education would prepare them for this all-important task.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hannah Moore, "The Practical Use of 'Female Knowledge'" and "On Education," *Strictures*. See also Bell, *The Character of a Virtuous Woman*: The virtuous woman is industrious, "does not waste her time in doing things to no profit, either for herself or others."

<sup>23</sup> John Hamilton Moore, "Learning, a Necessary Accomplishment in a Woman of Quality or Fortune," in *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Monitor* (New York, 1787).

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Moore, *Strictures*, Vol. I, Chapter IV. See also *The Female Advocate*, Written by a Lady (New Haven, 1801).

<sup>25</sup> Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner* (Boston, 1798). Vol. I, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Murray, p. 68. Harker, "Salutatory Oration." Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education*.

Three writers, Benjamin Rush, Judith Sargent Murray, and John Burton, went beyond theory in their statements about women's education. They presented suggestions for curriculum, specifying the branches of learning which young women should have. Apparent in most of these treatises was the desire to give the fair sex a useful education as well as an accomplished one. Rush wanted young women to learn the English language, write a fair and legible hand, have some knowledge of figures and bookkeeping, have an acquaintance with geography and some instruction in chronology, thus enabling them to read history, biography and travels. A general acquaintance with the first principles of astronomy, natural philosophy and chemistry, vocal music, dancing and reading should also be part of their schema of education. To integrate all these branches of learning, they should have "regular instruction in the Christian religion."<sup>27</sup> Murray and Burton concurred with Rush on the important elements of learning for young women, but emphasized much more the domestic art of "economy", more precisely the art of directing a household. The practical craft of the needle, both for useful purposes as well as ornamental, also received more emphasis from Murray and Burton.<sup>28</sup> All of them reiterated Kenrick's counsel: "thy kingdom is thy own house." Domestic economy was indeed the "whole duty of woman."

There are, however, two voices in the late eighteenth century that foreshadow another aspect of nineteenth century Victorian America, the early women's rights movement. The first of these was a woman, Judith Sargent Murray, mentioned above, who wrote for several of the magazines of the day. The second was Charles Brockden Brown, a novelist and literary writer. Murray, under the pseudonyms "Constantia" and "Mr. Virgilius", published articles in *The Massachusetts Magazine* which were later compiled into one publication, *The Gleaner*. The collection contained short novels, plays and essays

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<sup>27</sup> Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education*.

<sup>28</sup> Murray, Vol. I, p. 70; Burton, Lecture IX, Lecture XI.

through which she expressed her ideas on women's position. Margaretta, for example, at age sixteen, was engaged in the branches of learning noted above; she was an accomplished young woman in dancing and music, and was in every respect "the complete housewife." But Murray's further message was that the young woman should be independent, able to procure the necessaries of life for herself; that marriage should not be the *summum bonum* for her. A single life should be much preferred for the woman who had no real love for one she would marry. Young women, she said, should learn to reverence themselves; "undue gentleness or submissive acquiescence may border on meanness."<sup>29</sup>

Murray saw in society a new determination "to do justice to the Sex," and expected to "see our young women forming a new era in female history."<sup>30</sup> Murray's new era was long in coming. However, her suggestion that women be independent, that marriage was not the only option open to women and that they be prepared to support themselves in life were revolutionary suggestions for her times.

Charles Brockden Brown had even more revolutionary notions. He decried the poor education given to women: "they who know no other tool but the needle cannot be skillful at the pen."<sup>31</sup> He noted the exclusion of women from representative government which equated them with minors, blacks and non-residents, and observed their absence in the professions, though there was no legal barrier which excluded them. In his views on marriage Brown reiterated those of the Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft whose writings were well known in this country and much disputed.<sup>32</sup> He rejected the institution of marriage and allowed for the acceptability of divorce.<sup>33</sup> His views were indeed revolutionary, yet Brown had

<sup>29</sup> Murray, *The Gleaner*, p. 70, 74, 168, 193.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin*, Edited by Lee R. Edwards (1798; New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Alcuin*, p. 29, 16, 88.



little impact on the American social scene of the late eighteenth century.

In 1811 Joseph Richardson noted that the most striking feature of the eighteenth century was the change of opinion regarding "the importance, capacity, and dignity of the female sex." He called it "in short a revolution, radical and unprecedented . . . more an object of attention in the last thirty years."<sup>34</sup> Much as we might like to make a case that writers like Murray and Brown set a new direction for women which flowered in the nineteenth century, this is hardly true. Murray's words to women were hardly referred to when the women's rights movement began fifty years later.<sup>35</sup> Brown himself had little influence in the literary world, let alone in the larger society and its movement for reform.

We must say rather that the latter eighteenth century for women was the threshold of Victorianism. The image of women described by Barbara Welter began to take form in these last decades. The woman who emerged from these pages was dependent, confined to the most important duty of managing her home, bearing and raising her children and being a helper to her husband. These writers discussed equality of the sexes frequently at great length, yet it was an equality with a distinction, a distinction that resulted in a position of subordination for the woman. Women, they agreed, should be better educated, but it should be in accord with the "situations and employments of life to which they are allotted."<sup>36</sup> Most of these writers in calling for an education, asked for an education better than women had received in the past, but not the same kind of education the young man received. As Welter notes, even the female seminaries that arose in early

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<sup>34</sup> Richardson, *The Young Ladies' Selection*.

<sup>35</sup> Very little research has been done on Murray. See Vena B. Field, *Constantia: A Study of the Life and Works of Judith Sargent Murray*, 1931. See also Chester E. Jorgensen, "Gleanings from Judith Sargent Murray," *American Literature* (March, 1940). Dr. Janet W. James has a short, informative biography in *Notable American Women*, p. 603-605.

<sup>36</sup> Ann Harker, "Salutatory Oration." Rush makes the same point in his *Thoughts upon Female Education*.

nineteenth century America, hoped to enlarge and deepen the role which God had assigned to women, but not to change it.<sup>37</sup> She was to be useful, pious, modest and reserved, and not lose the "art of the blush." In fact she was often referred to as the Fair Sex, or simply "the Fair." She was educated to take her proper place in the home, not in the marketplace or in any public capacity.

Indeed, Bailyn is correct. The transformation of education that took place in the colonial period was irreversible;<sup>38</sup> it distinctively shaped the American personality. It trained and educated, not the women of a New Republic, the Daughters of Columbia, but rather the wives and mothers of the nineteenth century, the Daughters of Victoria.

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<sup>37</sup> Welter, p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> Bailyn, p. 49.

## 婦女的責任：十八世紀末葉婦女教育的討論

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摘 要

本文旨在探討十八世紀末葉有關美國婦女教育的理論。作者指出：雖然十八世紀末葉婦女教育日受重視，但當時的教育理論家却在討論這個問題的時候，有意無意間為維多利亞時代的婦女角色塑造了一個典型。當時認為婦女在智力方面與男人無異者固不乏人，然而這些人更主張另一種培養婦女依賴性的教育，他們強調婦女應該純潔、貞節、溫柔，並且擅於家務——這一切正是維多利亞時代婦女應有的美德。