

There are dizzying changes in fashions of thinking, too!

Do hemlines or necklines appear to be going up and down again like elevators? Do we rip out the basting in the made-over creation that was just the right length last year only to find that we are faced with yet another trend up or down? We certainly do! And what's worse, we'll often find almost the same quick reverses in attitudes toward matters quite unconnected with our wardrobe.

We may suddenly discover that our thoughts on taxation, ~~taxicabs~~, or taxidermists are frightfully old-fashioned; that everyone but us has switched to a new comedian on television, or that we are ridiculously behind the times in our opinion of parlor games, prominent authors, and the feeding schedules of infants. If we are impressionable, this situation can easily terrify us into attempting to follow abjectly every rapid change in modes of thinking we happen to learn about.

But if we are sufficiently strong-minded we can muster the courage to resist at least some of the insidious lures of the arbiters of styles in opinions, and then we can really congratulate ourselves. We will have gained the freedom to form our own home-grown attitudes toward change. We will be able to decide for ourselves which new trends are truly worthwhile, and which are fit subjects for yet another quick burial by public opinion six months from now.

Obviously, some changes in fashions of thinking are all to the good; we would not want to see any genuine improvements eclipsed. For example, a century ago well-intentioned men saw nothing

5-68P-2-

harmful in permitting small children to work long hours in factories. The public has also changed its mind in the last hundred years on the subject of debtors' prisons, daily baths, and votes for men who owned no property. Practically everyone is now firmly convinced that debtors can do better out of jail, baths should be taken more than once a month, and men who rent their homes have as much right to vote as those who own them. It would require a lot of talking to persuade us that the progress made in these fields should be reversed because someone thinks the old days were wonderful in every way.

Not all issues that face us are so clear cut as these, however. Even when a matter appears to some of us as wholly commendable, there will always be a few who simply don't agree, and still others who haven't bothered to think about it at all.

One example of what most of us think of as real progress has been in the field of education for women. If we think of it as worthwhile, we naturally don't want it to be subject to the same zig-zagging fashions and attitudes that force us to raise our hems or play madly at mah-jong, willy-nilly. Yet we are as likely to be assailed by second thoughts on education as on canasta if we aren't careful to make sure we know what our own convictions are. Good causes have perished before and can die still again, because people don't fight for them continuously. Higher education for women can become unfashionable, too, unless we keep on supporting it as wholeheartedly as the first zealous advocates did, not so long ago. Someday, some one may inform us light-heartedly that while college used to be considered stylish for girls, the newest thing is to stop at the sixth grade, "Because men love girls who are sweet and a bit dumb, nowadays."

5-68 p-3-

It used to be the fashion for young females to faint dead away on hearing a rough word. Then again, it was all the rage some years later for girls to fling naughty words around themselves. Right now apparently neither fainting nor foul language is in style among young ladies. What may turn up next year is unpredictable, but we can console ourselves with the thought that whatever happens next year will be terribly out-moded by the year-after-next. Can we afford to be equally nonchalant about our attitudes toward the education of these changeable young women? Should we be equally resilient in our ~~thoughts~~ attitudes if tomorrow we are told that it was a mistake to spend money on their high-school and college education? It's not impossible. It might conceivably become the last word in feminine elegance to emerge dewy-eyed from the eighth grade, fashionably unequipped with any book-learning whatsoever!

If we think higher education for women is a good example of real progress, we should defend it against idle meanderings of opinion. If we regard it as a new and nonetheless important American institution, we should demonstrate that we disagree with those who look upon it as a popular luxury of the moment, destined for the same decline in popularity that may affect a style of dress or a brand of perfume.

For it is indeed a new institution, newer than electricity, newer than steam engines, only a little older than airplanes. It can die a natural death from neglect, or it can be killed by ridicule or a change in fashion or a belittling approach on the part of irresponsible critics. It is still too young an institution to be completely accepted as such. Some of us even in the United

5-68 p -4-

States haven't yet thought about it deeply enough to see its implications for the future. We should stop and think about it, convince ourselves that we are doing the right thing in giving our daughters as much education as we can afford, and be sure we are correct when we give them approximately the same curriculum as we give our sons. If we come to the conclusion that this new phenomenon is a good one, we are prepared to answer those timid and changeable voices which are forever echoing to the latest noisy trend in fashions of thinking.

"Joan's father worked for years to put her through college, and then she turned around and got married right after graduation; what a waste of money!"

Every once in a while you'll hear some such sour lament, even now. It may only be the swan song of a dying age, but it should have been silenced long ago. Americans may be proud that many young women here complete high school or college before devoting their talents to marriage and child-rearing. We in the United States can rightfully say we were among the first in the world to discern that education didn't ruin a woman for domesticity and motherhood, as so many fearful old men had been saying for centuries. Americans were pioneers in higher education for women, while most of the world was still convinced that girls were too weak in the head to be considered as material for future citizens. It was also in this country that people first discovered it was possible to maintain coeducational schools where boys and girls could study together for their roles as responsible adults, instead of keeping separate schools where far different subjects were studied and it was a matter of principle to teach the girls practically nothing. We have reason to be proud of our pioneering

5-68 p -5-

in these fields, and of the open-minded men and women who defied the old traditions with the same spirit that led other pioneers to leave home for the dangers of the West.

Right now in the United States general education for women is taken somewhat for granted, so that its relative novelty is easily forgotten. It may be hard for us to see the matter in its proper prospective, because we easily forget that any other situation ever existed or still exists elsewhere. Yet even today in many other parts of the world the woman who has learned anything more than the bare essentials of reading and writing is rather unusual; those valiant women who have struggled to attend a university have done so against ~~the~~ great opposition; and co-educational schools are considered dangerous and radical by ~~most~~ conservative folk. There are several corners of the civilized world where it is still the height of fashion to keep young girls as ignorant of higher learning as a medieval maiden.

Actually, any ~~sort of higher education~~ large-scale movement for the higher education of women is such a rare phenomenon in world history that instances of it shine forth from the pages of books like brief meteors on a dark night. One might even say that the idea had never been given a real trial until the last fifty or sixty years, anywhere in the world. To us it now seems obvious that if we want a real democracy in which everyone is given a voice in the choosing of his government, we must have an enlightened electorate. We are pretty well convinced that women are people, too, and therefore should be included in the electorate. So we send girls to school to learn to be citizens just as we send their brothers, and most of the time we don't stop to remember how new this idea is.

5-68 p-6-

Still, a few people even in this country feel that while every American girl should know how to read and write and mark her ballot, anything beyond that in the way of learning is so much superfluous luxury unless she plans to be a school teacher. From a look at the registers of high schools and colleges crammed with girls as well as boys, we can judge that the ranks of those who feel this way are thinning year by year, but even in 1950 one hears echoes of those croaking voices who cried out "It's a waste of money!" down the corridors of the ages.

Sometimes these people move somewhat with the times. Often they claim only to want a more "practical" education for girls than for boys. "What good is Beowulf when a young mother is preparing her baby's formula?" they will ask. "What good does it do a housewife to have studied trigonometry or Roman history?" They will point out the infinitesimal number of young girls who are able to use their French in later years, and say this proves the senselessness of it all. To be consistent, they should ask the same questions about the boys who have studied side by side with the future mothers and housewives. What good does it do a man to have studied European history, philosophy, or Milton? Will it make him a better dentist, a better merchant, a better real estate agent? If it's useless for most women, it's just as useless ^{for} of the majority of men.

Yet more and more parents are struggling to provide higher education for all their children, here in the United States. Apparently a great many of us feel that these "useless" subjects have something in them, something useful not only for practical purposes or social display, but also for intangible reasons. They represent civilization. Civilization flowers where as many people

5-68 p -7-

as possible are studying it, respecting it, struggling for it. It is a product of the leisure of those races of men who have worked hard ~~enough~~ ^{and} ~~yet~~ still have ^d energy left over to devote to ~~something~~ beyond the strictly practical affairs of the moment. We think it's worth our efforts, and that why we send our sons and daughters through High School and college whenever we can. We want them to have a share in the civilization that surrounds them.

^{But} ~~yet~~ that isn't the only reason so many Americans scrimp and save to provide ^d education for all their children. We have other and perhaps more obviously practical reasons, too. Parents today realize that their daughters as well as their sons may very possibly have to earn their own living~~x~~ at some period in their lives. Educational advantages weigh heavily in employers' minds, and each parent wants to give his daughter as ~~g~~ good a chance as the next girl in the job market. A wise father looks upon the educational expenses of his daughter as an investment in security which isn't subject to inflation, can't be taken away from her, and which will guarantee her independence as far as anything in an uncertain world can. Suppose she does get married, and doesn't use her education to dazzle the eyes of prospective employers? It's still there, and he can't predict how soon she will need her degree to bolster her application for a job. It may be years later, when her children have grown up. On the other hand, she may find it necessary to help a struggling young husband by providing extra money at the beginning of their marriage. If she is left a widow, she'll be grateful for any help her educational background ~~may~~ provide. The thoughtful parent will feel that a good education for his daughter is just as important as savings bonds in the bank, even though the education, like the

5-68 p-8-

bonds, doesn't pay off immediately. They are both long-term investments.

The president of a great women's college recently said that when you educate one generation of women, you are educating their children, as well. This may seem obvious, almost too obvious to mention, but apparently it isn't. There are still those who say housewives and mothers never need the abstract learning necessary to school teachers or professional men. Some have tried to reverse the trend of what they feel is merely a fashion, and have raised the old bogey that education actually harms the majority of women- makes them discontented with their lot, gives them delusions of grandeur, and generally unfits them for the care of small children. The same people who have resurrected these tired ghosts of ancient fallacies would never consider hiring for the public schools of their community any but the best educated teachers available. Their children must have the best training they can afford!- except in their own homes. According to them, it doesn't matter if the mother knows absolutely nothing beyond plain cooking and elementary diaper-changing. Those who think this way are tacitly saying that education is obtainable only in schools, and that the home can give ~~them~~ nothing beyond material support. They are saying, in effect, "We think school children should have the smartest teachers we can find, but what's that got to do with our wives? The kids get all the education they need while they're at school. We can't be bothered at home."

When you look on a child's mother as his first and

-9- 5-68 p.9

continuously most important teacher, you are taking the point of view of that president of a great women's college. A father may possibly feel that his daughter's introduction to something vaguely called civilization is not of enormous importance, but he will almost always want the finest things in the world to be made available to his grandson. He may be able to provide financially for his grandson's school career, but if he has neglected to educate his daughter, her child will miss out on opportunities every day of his mouthful life. Is that so obvious anyone could figure it out? Apparently not, since for centuries no one thought of giving girls anything beyond the most meager introduction to the three R's, if that. There were two worlds, the man's world and the woman's world. Children belonged with the women, until the boys had grown enough to emerge into the man's world. Women were given almost no part in the intellectual life of civilizations, and it was assumed by practically everyone that they were incapable of understanding anything beyond their restricted sphere. Rich men would take infinite pains to provide their young sons with every opportunity to develop their minds, and go to great expense to surround them with wise and learned preceptors, but it scarcely occurred to any of them that the mothers of their children had of necessity a great influence on their sons' lives. For one thing, it was only recently that philosophers began to give any real weight to the first ten years of a man's life. It was forgotten that "the child is father to the man". A boy was pictured as blossoming overnight into manhood, with little or no trace of his infantile existence remaining in his make-up. Naturally, no one thought it possible for the

5-68 p -10-

boy to learn anything from the female world in which he was placed for his first few years. And he usually didn't, since that world had very little to offer him.

It is a completely new situation which we have here and now. We are working on a new principle: that a child's first ten or twelve years are of great importance; that his mother is his most valuable guide, especially in those early years; that in order to train her to be a good and efficient guide for his entry into the maze of the modern world, the mother must have both practical and theoretical education; that she has a duty to supplement the education her receives in school, and the better she is fitted by her own training to carry out this task, the better her child will be able to cope with problems in and out of school, now and in years to come. We do not limit ourselves to saying that a girl should learn to care for babies, for we know that babies grow up. We want our daughters to have the same education as our sons, since they will be living in the same world, with the same responsibilities as citizens. Their jobs will probably be different in a great many cases, but they both need to employ their youth as the time above all in which to acquire a general knowledge of the history and techniques of civilization. There will be time to specialize later. The boy will concentrate on earning a living, the girl more probably will devote herself to a family, but before they enter their particular fields, we want to give them both as great an insight into abstract knowledge as we are capable of giving and they of receiving. Therefore we should have no patience with those who are so short-sighted as to see no purpose in our expenditure of time and money on the education of our future mothers.

5-68 p-11-

Most of us hardly need to be convinced that Shakespeare will be of little assistance in preparing a baby's formula, but we do think that a nodding acquaintance with him might come in handy to the mother when her baby has grown a decade or so, and is in school himself. A majority of us agree that while a knowledge of European ^{history} doesn't help in the least when the little ones are screaming for their gereal, it provided a background for the mother's other role as a citizen. A great many yeung men in the United States are thoughtful enough to realize that if they want their children to be a credit to them in later years, they must see to it that the mothers of their children are alert enough and sufficiently educated to provide the right home environment. The fond husband of the old days, who according to reports delighted in his wife's charming ignorance and beamed affectionately on her captivating illiteracy, has presumably gone to his reward. Most Americans today want more response than a blank stare from their wives when some topic of wider general interest than junior's misbehavior is under discussion.

Though higher education for women has become an American institution only within recent years, it should be considered a permanent one, not a passing fancy. It is a national investment in the future whose full value may not be realized for many years, since we are only witnessing its beginnings, now. Let us give this new American institution a chance to develop and prove its worth. It is no small part of that American way of life in which we have so many legitimate reasons to feel pride.