

From "Provincial Pride" No 16, August 1970

MISS L. W. DALRYMPLE AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN

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While woman's place in the world and her proper sphere of activities are still debated in this day and age, there would be few indeed who would deny her as advanced an education as her brother, if she is capable of coping with it. The position was very different a hundred years ago. In the first place it was considered that women as a species were incapable of sustained study. Their physical and mental health would both be endangered by it. If the strength of some was such that they survived the ordeal what advantage was gained? What man wished for a wife better intellectually endowed than himself? Surely all men wished to be of superior education to their wives as well as their superior in all else. Few seemed to have been attracted by the idea of a wife as an intellectual companion. If this was to be the attitude of the men, then, in the eyes of most middle and upper class mammas, higher education became a positive menace. Their chief aim was to capture a good husband for their daughters and anything which militated against this must be avoided at all cost. Attractive accomplishments such as dancing, drawing, needlework or music were approved, but more intellectual studies, most definitely not. Many of those who did not actively disapprove of higher education for girls could see no advantage to be gained from it. A woman's task was to bear and bring up children, and to keep her house clean and her husband comfortable. What help would an advanced education be to her? (It is to be feared that this is one attitude that has not yet entirely disappeared). These views were by no means confined to New Zealand but were brought from Britain by the settlers. Private schools teaching "accomplishments" were fairly common there but before the middle of the nineteenth century schools providing more advanced education were all but non-existent. Even elementary education did not become compulsory till 1880.

Otago as a Scottish colony was in a better position education-wise than most. The Scottish people had always placed great value on education, and from the outset it was taken for granted that girls as well as boys should attend the district schools which were established. The founding fathers stated it as their intention to provide higher education for all children, and the Education Ordinance of 1856 actually laid down that public high schools for both boys and girls should be opened, but in actual fact, while the Boys' High School opened in 1863, nothing more was heard officially of a High School for girls.

The person chiefly responsible for rousing public support for the idea of higher education for girls and for persuading the Provincial Council to take action in the matter was a remarkable woman named Learmonth White Dalrymple. Her father was a merchant living in Coupar Angus in Scotland and she and her sister were sent to a boarding school at St. Andrews. The standard of the school can be only guessed at but it certainly did not satisfy Learmonth. Her father did not approve of Mathematics as a subject for girls and whatever the course of study Learmonth was left with "hopeless yearnings for mental culture". She did however travel extensively on the Continent and learned to speak French fluently. In 1853 the family, William Dalrymple, 3 daughters and 2 sons set sail for New Zealand in the "Rajah", intending to settle in the Wellington area. However, the friendship which grew up on the ship between themselves and the McGlashans persuaded them to move South again, and Mr. Dalrymple took up land, first at Goodwood, and then at Kaihiku in South Otago.

It was at this time in 1863 that an editorial in the Otago Daily Times inspired Learmonth to begin her campaign for the establishment of a High School for girls in Otago. She felt that, to be effective, the demand for higher education must come from the women themselves, and so she set about developing that demand. She first wrote for advice to her friend Major (later Sir) John Richardson, who represented the Clutha District in the Provincial Council and held the office of Speaker, one of the most respected men in the Colony. The long series of correspondence which followed brought her not only good advice but staunch and active support throughout her campaign. On his advice she drew up a petition to the Provincial Council begging for the establishment of a High School for girls and soon ten or twelve copies were circulating throughout the province seeking signatures of women only. This was not as easy as it might sound as women of the period were not used to taking part in public affairs and many were too timid to sign such a public document, and some papers were not even returned.

In the meantime Major Richardson and Mr. W. H. Reynolds brought the matter before the Provincial Council. They moved that higher education for girls should be encouraged and that a scheme for doing so should be introduced in the next session of the Council, or, if this was not yet

practicable, assistance should be given to those fitted to attend higher classes in suitable private schools. The motion was affirmed by the Council—and exactly nothing was done about it. This was the frustrating situation which Miss Dalrymple and her allies were to face for the next few years. Each session of the Council motions or questions would be introduced and meet little opposition but evoke no action.

In 1865 it was decided to hold a public meeting. A large upstairs room called St. George's hall was hired but then arose the first difficulty : who was to chair the meeting? Miss Dalrymple felt that, as an unmarried woman, her place was in the background, but everyone she approached declined. Finally Mrs. Thomas Dick, wife of the Superintendent, was persuaded to take the chair on the conditions that it be understood she did so in virtue of her husband's office, and that Miss Dalrymple do all the talking. To ensure an audience, in addition to advertising the meeting, Miss Dalrymple personally wrote to or called on most of the Dunedin ladies who she thought would have any influence. And so the day arrived, a reasonable audience appeared, Mrs. Matthew Holmes opened the meeting with a prayer and Miss Dalrymple stood up, notes in hand, to make her speech. Her words were never heard. They were completely drowned by the playing of a band at the bottom of the stairs, placed there by accident or design she never knew. The meeting broke up in confusion and Miss Dalrymple, Mrs. Holmes and Mrs. Every found themselves alone. However, from then on private meetings of interested ladies appear to have been held and the copies of the petition which had been returned were duly presented to the Provincial Council with the usual result.

For the next two years Miss Dalrymple and her friends worked on steadily. Every opportunity was taken to spread their ideas and information was collected from all over New Zealand and Great Britain. Miss Dalrymple later estimated that during six years of campaigning she wrote between 700 and 800 letters.

The advocates of higher education for girls had so far failed to enlist the support of the then Superintendent, Mr. Macandrew. Miss Dalrymple now tried an indirect attack through his wife, and apparently wrote so persuasively, that that lady invited her to visit overnight so that she could have a nice long chat with the Superintendent. Miss Dalrymple duly journeyed round the harbour to the Peninsula (she was by this time living at Port Chalmers) and apparently "chatted" to such good effect that Mr. Macandrew instructed the Secretary of the Education Board to sketch proposals. Largely as a result of the Secretary's report an Education Commission was set up to determine the best site and scheme for the establishment of a Girls' High School.

Meanwhile another petition had been prepared and another public meeting called. The subject had become a popular issue and a lively correspondence was being carried on in the press. The ladies' meeting this time was much more successful. The petition and other relevant information was discussed, including a long letter of advice from Miss Frances Boss, one of the leading English headmistresses of the day, and a series of recommendations drawn up to be sent to the Education Commission. These recommendations and the petition were well received by the Commission which reported strongly in favour of the immediate establishment of the "Otago Girls' Seminary" for "higher education".

Action was taken at last. It was decided to open the school in a wing of the existing Boys' High School, though it was to be completely separate from it, and Mrs. Margaret Gordon Burn, an extremely able Scotswoman, was appointed as its first Lady Principal on June 9, 1870. The Otago Provincial School for Girls, later to be known as the Otago Girls' High School, began classes on the 6th February, 1871, the first public girls' high school in the Southern Hemisphere and the 5th in the British Empire.

But Miss Dalrymple's efforts on behalf of the higher education of women were not yet over. At this period the University of Otago was being established and she and her friends were very anxious that women students should be admitted on an equal footing with men. A petition to this effect was drawn up and duly presented, and in fact, in the regulations which were drawn up, no distinction was made between men and women students. To commemorate their admission on equal terms money was collected to found a scholarship, the Women's Scholarship, and in this connection Miss Dalrymple published a letter addressed to "The Combined Working Corps of the University" stating her views on the higher education of women. This should aim "to fit the individual to realize the path of duty" and develop "the understanding and affection that with knowledge might also come wisdom."

History plays strange tricks concerning those she remembers and those she forgets. The women of Otago in particular owe a great deal to Lear-month Dalrymple and her name deserves to be much more widely known and respected. Let us hope that in all the flurry of centennial celebrations some at least will have time to remember the "mother" of Otago Girls' High School.