MRS. DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER'S VIEWS ON SOCIETY, EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEMS OF SANE LIVING AS REVEALED IN HER WRITINGS

by

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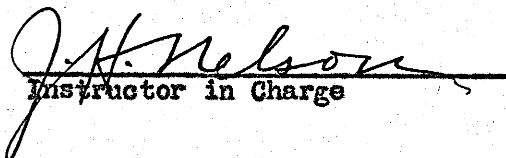

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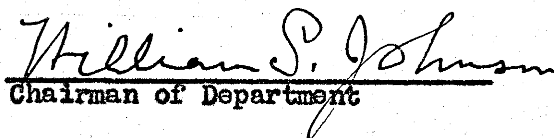

Chairman of Department

March 25, 1930.

Dedicated to my Mother

Preface

In this study of Mrs. Dorothy Canfield Fisher I have tried to show the trend and extent of Mrs. Fisher's social interest, and how this interest has colored her writings. Mrs. Fisher is interested in people regardless of cast or creed. She is possessed of an insatiable desire to promote the good of all by promoting the good of the individual. She purposes to stimulate the growth of America and, therefore, is especially interested in social problems.

To answer the question of why I have selected a living author for this study, I wish to say that I became interested in Mrs. Fisher's writings when I was living in a very small, inland town in the western part of Kansas. I was aroused by Mrs. Fisher's sincere and intimate human interest. I especially admired her short stories of the people of Hillsboro, Vermont, and of France. She expresses a wholesome and stimulating philosophy of which the radical elements have been stablized by a line of Puritan ancestory and a keen, healthy, mind.

For my sources of study I have drawn from Mrs. Fisher's scholarly works, translations, novels and short stories.

I wish to thank Mrs. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, William Allen White, Jonathan M. Davis, Mrs. Molly Emery, Professor R.D. O'Leary, and Professor S.L. Whitcomb for their kindness in helping me make this study.

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Chapter I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MRS. DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

Dorothy Canfield Fisher has been in turn publicist, official, teacher, and novelist. She is intimately acquainted with humanity and concerned for it. Her life has been filled with rich and beautiful activity. Mr. Overton speaks of her as, ". . . one of those fine people who make the plain word 'service' a shining and symbolic thing. Service is no longer a word but a ritual and liturgy."[1] She is a woman of unusual vigor and action. Her primary interest is living and helping others to live. For her, art is a secondary consideration.

Dorothy Canfield (christened Dorothea Frances but after her marriage Mrs. Fisher simplified it to Dorothy) was born in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1879. Her old home still stands, though so much altered as to be hardly recognizable as the old Canfield home.

Mr. Canfield, Dorothy's father, was a professor in the University of Kansas. At first he "taught English and Economics but later he sloughed off English, teaching History, Sociology, and Economics. He was the most popular professor the University knew in those days. He was known as 'Jimmie' and his classes were crowded. Dorothy and her brother James, as little children, used to come on the Hill for him,

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[1] Grant Overton, Women Who Make Our Novels, p. 298.

often to take him home, and they went swinging down the Hill together. He was a gorgeous father who romped and played with his children like a great New Foundland brother."[1]

Mrs. Canfield, Dorothy's mother, is an artist and writer. She studied in Paris, and had a studio there when Dorothy was a small girl. At this time Dorothy made her first acquaintance with the French people; an interest which has ripened into a broad sympathy and understanding. Mrs. Fisher in recalling her early visits to France says:

> As a child and young girl I spent occasional years of my life across the street from the old Hotel de Cluny in Paris, used to roll my hoop in the dingy little public garden back of it, and to spend a good many leisure hours mooning around its abominably lighted, charming, cluttered, beautifully proportioned and musty old rooms. I was very familiar with its moral atmosphere, with its attendants, with the people who used to go in and out of it. The Cluny Museum was . . . more like the attic of an old family home, filled with things which nobody had bothered to dispose of, a mixture of moth-eaten miscellanies and invaluable relics of the past.[2]

Mr. Jonathan M. Davis, who was a chum of Mrs. Fisher's brother Janes, remembers Dorothy as a "bright, sprightly little girl. . . James would take an extra apple from the barrel I had in my room presumably for Dorothy."[3]

Dorothy's parents moved from Lawrence to Lincoln where Mr. Canfield was made Chancellor of the University of Nebraska. Dorothy was then eleven. Here she spent her high school days and began the study habits

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[1]Letter of W.A. White to writer.
[2]Why Stop Learning, p. 224.
[3]Letter of J.M. Davis to writer.

which were later to make her a scholar. The Pershings were in Lincoln at that time and became great friends of the Canfield family. Dorothy became a favorite of young John Pershing, then in charge of the Training School there. He taught Dorothy something of higher mathematics; and how to ride his horse. The Bryans, and Willa Cather, too, were in Loncoln at that time and frequently visited at the Canfield home.[1]

The feet of the Canfields were destined to move eastward. Dr. Canfield became President of Ohio State University at Columbus. These were Dorothy's college days. She was popular both socially and in the classroom. She pledged the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and joined various other organizations. Her contact with the West had left her a full-fledged democrat. While her father was at Ohio State University, Dorothy completed the work for her Ph.B. there in 1899.

In both Mrs. Fisher's life and her writing we see frequent outcroppings of her educational interest. For three years she was secretary of the Horace Mann School at Yellow Springs, Ohio, from 1902 to 1905. Mrs. Fisher resigned this secretary-ship and studied romance languages at the Sorbonne in France and at Columbia University. At that time Dr. Canfield was Librarian of the Seth Law Library, "a famous library, one of the great libraries of America."[2] Mrs. Fisher received her Ph.D. in romance languages from Columbia University in 1904. For her Doctor's thesis she made a study of Corneille and Racine in England, which has since been found worthy of publication.

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[1]Letter of W.A. White to writer.

[2] Letter of W.A. White to writer.

John Redwood Fisher was captain of the Columbia football team. It was at Columbia that Dorothy Canfield met him. After their marriage, in 1907, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher travelled in Europe; from which they returned to make their home two miles from Arlington, Vermont, a tiny little village in the Green Mountains. Arlington had been the ancestral home of both the Fishers and the Canfields. As a little girl, Mrs. Fisher had spent many summers there, rambling over the mountains and breathing the invigorating air.

The old house was remodeled to suit the needs of the Fisher family. Water was piped from a spring near by, and an electric plant was installed. After the addition of this modern equipment, the Fishers settled down to a simple, wholesome life among the Hills. Like John Burroughs, Mrs. Fisher had a study out among the trees, away from the house with its imposing duties and where the hills could pour out their inspiration unceasingly. However, we have no occasion to think that the house or the children suffered from neglect. J. Farrar speaks of Mrs. Fisher as an, "eager mother and wife; swift, active, almost bird-like. . . she is kindly, sympathetic and understanding."[1] When her son Jimmie, at eleven, objected to fairy stories and fables, his mother conjured up some made to order. These have been published and are called The Made-To-Order-Stories.

While Mrs. Fisher was caring for her home and writing sketches about Vermont life, Mr. Fisher was executing plans for the reforesta-

[1] The Bookman Anthology of Essays, (1923), p. 236.

tion of the old Fisher and Canfield estates. This tract of land comprised several thousand acres. The carrying out of Mr. Fisher's project, required forethought, great energy, years of time and great expense. He rejuvenated an ancient sawmill to care for the unsalable timber. This enterprise may have furnished the idea for Neale Crittenden,[1] a forester, but Neale does not represent Mr. Fisher nor Marise, Mrs. Fisher. Mrs. Fisher often uses atmosphere in which she has lived; this she does so realistically that it leaves the impression of being autobiographical material.

The atmospheres of Mrs. Fisher's novels and short stories show strongly the influence of her Vermont life. She shows a certain tenderness for the hills, the soil and all the life they sustain:

> . . . young things breaking through the garden sod, maple twigs reddish with their bloom, slender white birches, green leaves, tufts of grass[2]. . . . .
> . . . little yellow balls [running] foreward on their wiry legs, darting at invisable insects, turning their shiny black eyes about alertly and filling the air with their sweet, thin pipings.[3]

Long, formal descriptive passages are foreign to Mrs. Fisher's novels: rather she makes her atmospheres an integral part of her writing.

Occasionally, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher leave the peace of their Vermont home, for a trip abroad. They and their daughter Sally

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[1] One of the principal characters in The Brimming Cup

[2] Hillsboro People, p. 167.

[3] Ibid., p. 169.

spent the winter of 1912 in Rome. Mrs. Fisher is very much interested in children and their education. Having heard various reports of Dr. Montessori's work, Mrs. Fisher was eager to investigate the school herself. All that winter she studied the Montessori system. She became converted to Dr. Montessori's method of teaching and recognized in it some elements needed in our American educational system. While in Italy, Mrs. Fisher wrote The Montessori Manual--a simplification and Americanized form of Dr. Montessori's Manual; and also an adaptation of its principles for American mothers in The Montessori Mother. After her return to America, Mrs. Fisher spent her time writing articles about the Montessori system and answering inquiries about it. In Mothers and Children, Mrs. Fisher has tried to answer many private inquiries.

Mrs. Fisher has five educational books to her credit, two of which deal with children and their education--Understood Betsy; and Self-Reliance; one dealing with adult education--Why Stop Learning?; fourth, a study of the influence of Corneille and Racine in England called Corneille and Racine in England; and fifth she and George R. Carpenter wrote a textbook for English classes--Elementary Composition.

Mrs. Fisher's educational activities have not stopped with making programs for others to follow. In 1921, after her return from Europe she was appointed as the only woman member of the State Board of Education of Vermont and served two terms. This board, during Mrs. Fisher's service, reconstructed the public school system of that state. Special effort was made to overcome the faults of the rural

school and make it a desirable part of our educational system.

Mrs. Fisher has travelled much abroad, especially in France. She has also travelled and studied in Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark and England; and has become mistress of the language of these countries.

Long before the United States entered the World War, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher felt the call and volunteered their services. Mr. Fisher entered the ambulance service and after arriving in France had charge of an ambulance training camp near Paris. Mrs. Fisher tarried at home two months in order to finish her Understood Betsy; and then with the children, Sally and James, she sailed for France, August, 1916.

Mrs. Fisher entered active service at once. She carried on a prodigious amount of work all through the war:

> At first running almost entirely alone the work for soldiers blinded in battle, editing a magazine for them, editing [sic] the presses, often with her own hands, getting books for them, all the time looking out for refugees and personal cases that came to her attention: caring for children from the evacuated portions of France; organizing work for them, and she dropped that and ran the camp on the edge of the war zone where her husband was stationed to train young ambulance drivers; and while there she started any number of important things--reading rooms, etc. Then she went back to Paris.[1]

While in Paris Sally contracted typhoid fever. Mrs. Fisher took her to Southern France to recuperate. During Sally's convalescence her mother made notes on war-ridden France, producing The Day of Glory and her best book--Home Fires in France. Mrs. Fisher estab-

[1]Grant Overton, Women Who Made Our Novels, p. 298.

lished a convalescent home for delicate children, at the base of the Pyrenees. This home still continues under government control.

After the Armistace, the Fishers returned to their home in Vermont. The Hills, spring sowing, and the quiet peace of their Arlington home furnished the balm necessary after the strenuous life in France. In The Brimming Cup we feel some of the freshness and new joy of life which Mrs. Fisher must have experienced upon her return. A year later with a picture of pre-war Europe in mind she wrote Rough Hewn.

Mrs. Fisher is very much interested in people of all classes. Her home is the center of Arlington social life. Many Arlington events and people find themselves crystallized in her Hillsboro People. She portrays them with candor, sympathy and understanding.

Mrs. Fisher is especially interested in social problems. Her novels are very often based upon some problem and its solution--those of the home, of education, and especially those which make lives narrow and mean.

Mrs. Fisher is greatly concerned with man's growth and development.

Chapter II

Problems of Domestic Happiness

1. Mrs. Fisher's Interest in Domestic Life

Mrs. Fisher has experienced both the fortunes and misfortunes of a married woman since 1907. Being a home-maker herself, she is interested in the home as a vital institution of society. She recognizes the significance of love, marriage, children and all other elements making up the home. Mrs. Fisher pursues the problems of the home with energy and purpose. She feels that the home should be a stable and harmonious unit. Her novels: The Brimming Cup, The Squirrel-Cage, The Home-Maker, and Her Son's Wife, and many of her short stories, are founded upon some paramount issue of the home which involves the preservation or destruction of domestic happiness.

2. The Parents' Relations With One Another

In her treatment of marriage, Mrs. Fisher is both democratic and conservative. Like Rousseau, Mrs. Fisher emphasizes the rights of the individual. She preaches freedom modified by necessary restraint. She advocates the freedom of the individual, but nowhere does she show that she would grant both sexes equal privileges in the pursuit and acquisition of a mate.

The Squirrel-Cage is symbolic of the narrow limits of our conventions. Mrs. Fisher does not object to all conventions, but only

those ages old which are no longer applicable, yet which still hamper our social freedom. In The Squirrel-Cage, Mrs. Fisher calls our attention to the tragedies among the daughters of the socially ambitious, well-to-dos; Lydia Emery's parents were so intent upon social advancement for themselves that they forgot to consider Lydia in the matter, although they rationalized themselves into thinking that they worked only for Lydia's good.[1] Lydia was powerless to resist the forces pushing her into marriage with Paul Hollister--a man whom she fears rather than loves.

The only bond of unity for human relationships is love. Mrs. Fisher believes in love as the hope of the world. Love gives us courage to meet life:

> What is love for, but to give greater strength
> than we have?[2]

Paul and Lydia were like two unsoldered links of a chain. In the beginning Lydia hoped for love but the stronger personality merely continued to dominate the weaker. Mrs. Fisher points out that one personality may so dominate another as to give the illusion of being in love; and also that passion at first sight may appear to be love. Lydia Emery was overwhelmed by Paul Hollister's personality, and Marise Crittenden mistook for love her passion for Vincent Marsh. Mrs. Fisher shows in their experiences the dangers in love and marriage which is not substantiated by sincere affection.

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[1]Squirrel-Cage, Chapter I.

[2]Brimming Cup, p. 6.

Mrs. Fisher awakens the reader's curiosity to know how she will solve Lydia's unhappy situation. If the question is faced there can be but one solution--divorce. Seemingly, Mrs. Fisher does not wish to face this question, and evades it by having Paul accidently killed. There is in The Squirrel-Cage no solution which will be of value to the hundreds of people in Lydia's and Paul's position.

The married life of Marise Allen with Neale Crittenden is far different from that of Lydia Emery and Paul Hollister. Marion and Paul are the ideal husband and wife: they have love, sympathy, and understanding. Marise came under the power of a vivid personality. Her problem then was: should a wife leave her husband for another who promised her greater realizations of life? Mrs. Fisher has already drawn the home bonds too tightly about Marise for her to escape them. The Vermont hills fascinated her; the community looked to her as its leader; her three children are charming; and Neale is a tower of strength to her. Marise has so much in life that we are surprised at her yielding to mere nervous excitement. Although Marise yields to Vincent Marsh's attractions we are confident that it will be only momentary. Rough Hewn confirms our belief in Marise. She could not escape from her childhood training which was most severe.

We are disappointed in so negative a decision from a woman of Marise Crittenden's character. She does not reject Vincent Marsh, nor accept him, but rather flees to Neale, because she cannot do without his strength. This momentary weakness may be feminine, but it is not consistent with Marise's character. Had Vincent Marsh been Neale

Crittenden's superior or even his equal, we could not have been sure of Marise's decision. If this were true we might feel that Mrs. Fisher had given us more than a pet theory of her own. According to the Brimming Cup, Marise chose the stronger man, regardless of his relations to her.

In Her Son's Wife we meet another familiar situation--the misfits. Neither the wife nor the husband have the strength of character necessary to solve their problem, as a consequence it devolves upon the husband's mother--Mary Bascombe. Mary Bascombe is a middle-aged teacher, who has acquired the meticulous habits of that profession. Mrs. Fisher has chosen the kind of ahome in which a situation of this kind will most likely to be found, and a Mary Bascombe is needed to solve it.

Few mothers would endure living with a characterless slouch like Lottie. As is often true, a child is the means of family salvation. When Mary Bascombe discovers her long dead husband resurrected in her grand-daughter, Dids, she loses no time. She does not avoid issues, but rather attacks them relentlessly and with fortitude. Mrs. Fisher stresses the thought that an understanding is the first step necessary between individuals in solving this problem. Although we are horrified by Mary Bascombe's decision, we are mollified in the end when we find what happiness it brings to all, even Lottie. Few women would have the courage to attact the problem as Mary Bascombe did; and there are few who would not quail before such a solution: it seems so near to murder. Mrs. Fisher does not fail to take into consideration the difficulties Mary Bascombe had to overcome. The

solution is very extraordinary, but in it Mrs. Fisher accomplished her ends--to bring harmony and happiness into a disordered family.

With Mr. and Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Fisher shows us the likely conclusion of a marriage like that of Paul and Lydia Hollister. This couple find that life has grown stagnant. The author suggests divorce as a possible remedy, but rejects it for a tragic death--which is like the recess bell on an arithmetic lesson.

In A Sleep and a Forgetting,[1] again we feel Mrs. Fisher's desire to see life lived whole-heartedly and at its best. Here in the life of Mr. Warren and again in that of J. Farwell Allen,[2] Mrs. Fisher brings to light the unhappy depths to which the over sophisticated may descend. Mr. Warren loses his identity and wanders from his old life into a new--that of a gardener. Mrs. Fisher feels that a close contact with nature is a healing balm, for many of man's woes. Certainly, she finds in it a cure for Mr. Warren. He is not the first of Mrs. Fisher's characters who seek solace in nature--we see this in three of her principal male characters: Austin Page,[3] Mr. Rankin,[4] and Neale Crittenden.[5]

Mrs. Fisher takes us through some of Mr. Warren's most trying ordeals. She necessarily gives him the courage of Ulysses when she

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[1] The Real Motive, p. 49-71.

[2] Ibid., "An Untold Story", p. 241-258.

[3] The hero of The Bent Twig.

[4] A character in The Squirrel-Cage.

[5] The hero of The Brimming Cup.

has him abandon money, family, and social position. These are the things dearest to man's heart; and hardest for him to part with.

Mrs. Fisher points out in <u>The Home Maker</u> how conventions create multifarous problems for the home and home-makers. Conventions are mostly unjust and unrighteous since they are based upon tradition rather than reason. Mrs. Fisher joins in warmly with the democratic youth movement, when subdued by intellect and maturer wisdom.

The world frowns upon the woman who earns the living, and pities her; but it sneers at the able-bodied man who lets her do it. However this snear in no wise compares with that the world has for the man who turns home-maker--"he is good-for-nothing, lazy, worthless." If we are really honest with ourselves and others, we can point out instances where domestic unhappiness is caused by the occupational misfittings of husband and wife. In <u>The Home-Maker,</u> Mrs. Fisher takes up just this problem. She also points out how conventions handicap solving a situation of this kind.

Mrs. Krapp, of <u>The Home-Maker,</u> is a natural born business woman. Her husband, Mr. Krapp, is a dreamer, an idealist, a humanitarian. Both have struggled to retain their honor and fill the positions allotted them as man and wife. Both have failed--Mr. Krapp visibly and Mrs. Krapp only hiding her failure by sheer strength of will. Mrs. Krapp's energy at home-making has won for her the reputation of an ideal housekeeper and mother. Without knowing it, she has made a martyr of herself by her calm self-control and by hiding her feelings. As a mother, she is no more a success than Lottie Bascombe: she

merely bullies and intimidates her children while Lottie neglects hers and permits them to do as they please.

Mrs. Fisher's hypothesis is that home-making is an honorable occupation regardless of the sex making the home or the conditions under which it is made. She believes that everyone should be allowed to work where he can do his best and enjoy doing it. She does not believe in social interference. The individual good helps make up the good of the whole. The individual's good consists of individual rights and freedom which are reasonable, according to Mrs. Fisher. Since society does not grant this freedom to Mr. Krapp, he finds it through auto-invalidism. The author justifies her solution by pointing out that it is the end rather than the means which counts. In this instance, Mr. Krapp gains the desired end--success and harmony in the home. He calms Stephen; cures Henry's nervous and digestive disorders; creates geniality in the home; and places his wife in the position for which she is fitted.

Mrs. Fisher might be said to advocate greater range for man's activity--yes, and for woman also. As long as Mr. Krapp's position of home-maker was determined by circumstances, society was kind; but let him get well and retain his old position! Mrs. Fisher does not believe that any human being should be forced into making a sacrifice like Mr. Krapp's in order to maintain the happiness of his family.

Of all the domestic dilemmas which Mrs. Fisher uses as the basis of her novels and short stories, she is most successful and most fair in the one presented in The Home-Maker. Here she combats the evil forces of convention without concealed weapons or motives. Mrs.

Fisher remains firm and convincing in her doctrine of individual rights. Without question, she forces a time in the near future when Mrs. Krapp may dig ditches if she so desires; and Mr. Krapp may be a milliner.

3. The Relations of Parents With Their Children

The biggest problem of the home is the children: the feeding, clothing, educating and training of them. The children are affected by environment and heredity. Parents like Mr. Smith send their children out into the world to spend wretched, unhappy lives because of their own selfishness.[1] In the short story, "A Good Fight and the Faith Kept", we have a youth fighting against melancholy to which the family have been victims for generations. This mental weakness robs him of love, marriage, home, children and happiness. Mrs. Fisher holds out hope to us by proving that mental strength can fight successfully even against hereditary forces.[2]

Parents are responsible for the child's environment. They decide upon the community in which they will live, the occupation they will follow--which largely determines the educational advantages given the children and the society into which they will be introduced. The home has the greatest environmental influence upon the children. It can in a large measure make up for the deficiencies of a community or poor educational advantages. Mrs. Fisher lays special stress upon the significance of home training.

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[1] Character in the Bent Twig

[2] The Real Motive, p. 73 ff.

Both parents have a place in the home and should share in the training of the children. Although we commonly think of the mother as being the home teacher, Mrs. Fisher would dissuade us from that belief. There are odd moments when the father has greater influence than the mother:

> The very fact that he is not with the children so constantly, that he comes and goes into a bigger world of adult decisions, is apt to mean that his instinctive sense of proportion remains truer than the mothers.[1]

However, except in irregular cases, the mother is the chief home-maker. She feeds, clothes, nurses and trains the children during pre-school days when their minds are so plastic and while they are learning the fundamental habits of life.

Mrs. Fisher feels that a mother's place is in the home, and with the children. She considers a nurse as a bad thing for them--if the mother thus evades responsibility she cannot hope to teach the child to be responsible. The nurse's "very presence makes difficult any appeal for cooperation by the children in the activity of the family."[2]

An uninterested nurse certainly is not qualified to take the place of a sympathetic and understanding mother, but an uninterested nurse is no worse than an uninterested mother, and an interested, loving nurse far surpasses her. Sympathy and understanding are

[1] Mothers and Children, p. 37.

[2] Self-Reliance, p. 47.

essential before either mother or nurse can receive a willing response to her appeal. A nurse could not have made a greater failure of obtaining a response from Stephen than did his mother. She neither understood him nor tried to do so. That was the reason she cried in despair:

> He drives me frantic--it'll be an awful relief when he starts to school with the others. Perhaps the teachers can do something with him. I don't envy them! [1]

We could hardly expect any child to respond graciously when his mother regarded him in this light. Children's carelessness, forgetfulness and childishness did not worry Mr. Krapp, and consequently he got along famously with the children, even little Stephen.

Patience is necessary in dealing with children. Mrs. Fisher counsels parents, teachers, and all adults dealing with them to allow them time to do things for themselves--to learn to be self-reliant. Worried, forced patience does not answer. Mrs. Krapp felt that she must try to endure patiently or with the appearance of patience the childish carelessness, and forgetfulness.[2] She did not fool Stephen. He felt her impatience in the keen edge of her voice, the snap of her eyes, the taut lines of her face and hundreds of other little ways of which she was unaware.

In Mothers and Children, a book especially for mothers, Mrs. Fisher opens the mother's eyes to many little ways, often neglected,

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[1] The Home-Maker, p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 47.

which are of utmost importance in training the child. She says give the child responsibility, let him mend his own clothes, answer the telephone or doorbell, or run errands. Responsibilities are helpful in that

> . . . they help to free the child from a detached, passive attitude toward what goes on in his home, which is the surest beginning to the objectional, detached and irresponsible attitude toward life in general.[1]

Mrs. Fisher advises helping the child along natural lines of development, but she draws a line of distinction between that and coddling. Coddling creates selfishness, and wilfulness on the part of the child.

Over-loving parents, particularly mothers, ruin dispositions, healthy nervous systems and normal digestions. Poor little Henry, who could not eat one store cookie, grew into a strong, robust child after his father took matters in hand; and he could have eaten a dozen store cookies following them with a good play or sound sleep. The coddled child does not know how to do things for himself, he is a parasite upon others. Mrs. Fisher says of children with emphasis, train them to know what they want and go after it.[2] She advocates letting the child

> . . . learn that wishes are not to be gratified without effort, and finally that he has begun the habit of turning emotion into action, of doing something to make his dreams come true.[3]

[1] Self-Reliance, p. 45.

[2] Ibid., p. 8.

[3] Ibid., p. 105.

Let him make his own toys instead of buying limitless numbers for him. "Boughten toys" soon lose their attraction and lie around for mother tocare for or stumble over--but they have a greater disadvantage than that, according to Mrs. Fisher: they discourage creative work and kill initiative:

> Children should spend as little of their precious youth as possible hankering after ready made possessions, and as much time as possible creating for themselves the things they desire.[1]

She follows this admonition with an extensive list of things which children may make and gives information as to where to obtain the materials and on other necessary matters. Mrs. Fisher points out that home-made toys have an advantage over store toys in that they give exercise to the child's imagination; they use up energy and are always dear to him because he has put some of himself into them.

Children crave companionship--someone to whom they can tell their woes, and in return receive sympathy; someone who will play with them and notice them. Lydia Emery received everything which money could provide, but she lacked the companionship of her parents. Her parents did not confide in her, nor she in them. The Krapp children had a rich comradeship with their father, especially after he took over the management of the home. In the Marshall home, there was a companionship which was nearly ideal. No home is attractive to children unless it offers personal contacts not only with friends but with parents, brothers and sisters.

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[1]Self-Reliance, p. 59.

Children enjoy most the parents and grandparents who keep young--not "kiddish" or immature, but young in mind and optimistic toward life. Marise's father was not fit to keep her company because he no longer cared for life. He said that birthdays, ". . . always make me think of the ones I have still to get through with year after year, one by one."[1] Anyone who feels like that is far too old to be a suitable companion for a child. Children like to see, cropping out now and then, evidences that their adult friends were once children like themselves, and do not like to feel as Neale felt about his grandparents:

> Grandfather and Grandmother did not look so very much older to Neale at twenty-four than they had to the eight year old, having always looked as old as possible.[2]

Mrs. Fisher pictures the father (Mr. Krapp[3]) who stopped and played games with the children, and Mrs. Marshall[4] the mother who played and worked with them even allowing them to fumble around trying to help. Helping makes them feel so grown up, and its more fun being grown up when you're little than it is in reality.

Lydia Emery was smothered by materialism; while the Marshalls sought to avoid it. They had companionship and a pleasant, sociable home, but it was too unworldly and austere. The Marshalls made too great an effort to confine their interests to the highest. Sylvia,

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[1]Rough-Hewn, p. 351.

[2]Ibid., pp. 297-298.

[3]Character in The Home-Maker.

[4]Character in The Bent Twig.

who

> ". . . had been literally rooted by Marshall soil, watered by Marshall convictions and fed by Marshall information," [1]

found it difficult to make the transition from her home tothe world. At home she had been protected from the severe, and guarded from contact with the ugly. This transition was less trying for Sylvia's sister, Judith, because she was too practical to assimilate enough of the unworldliness of her home to injure her. Sylvia was too curious and eager to grasp. She revolted against the ugly and vulgar, longing for the most beautiful. Her childhood had been like the ". . . great clusters of flowers dreaming away an enchanted life behind the shining glass windows."[2] "She never quite recovered from being transplanted into a real earth in a real world."[3] All through her life she had to battle against disillusions.

The selfish parent erects barriers between himself and the child. We see this in the selfishness of Mrs. Krapp, who wished above everything else to preserve order and cleanliness, and to have the children do her will; the selfishness of Mr. Smith, who loved pleasure more than his child; the selfishness of egotistic parents and friends who are like Aunt Vic:

> She parches, yes, she dries up the blood but not by her passion, not even by ours. Honest passion never kills. It's the Sahara sands of her egotism into which we've all emptied our veins[4]

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[1]Bent Twig, p. 106.
[2]Ibid., p. 134.
[3]Ibid., p. 268 .
[4]Ibid., pp. 421 and 422.

the selfishness of parents who do not want their children to grow up but try always to keep them dependent upon them. Neale Crittenden felt this in his parents and it almost ruined his life. He concluded that:

> Till he could be really independent and do as he liked without suffering the ignominy of having people know about it and talk it over, it might be better to skid along the grooves provided, yet the labels stuck on you. It couldn't do any harm they'd soak off easily enough later on.[1]

This patronizing on the part of his parents made it hard for Neale to speak fully with them. It was not until he was in college that he found, "it almost as easy to talk to his parents as if they had been strangers."[2]

Almost all parents hold professional or social ambitions for their children. Mothers desire that their daughters marry above their social station. Over ambitious mothers isolate or abolish any factor which is likely to prove a social disgrace--M. Bodard was confined to his boudoir because of his bourgeoisie manners.[3] Children are carried into unhappy marriages for social advancement--Lydia Emery was kept in her "squirrel-cage".[4] Other parents are always moving about looking for a Utopia of their dreams and succeed at least in breeding discontent and unhappiness in their family, just as the

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[1] Rough-Hewn, p. 166.

[2] Ibid., p. 239.

[3] Raw Material, "Ideas of M. Brodard"

[4] Heroine of The Squirrel Cage, p. 83 ff.

Breherns were continually moving from Europe to America, looking for social refinement and democratic sociability in the same community.[1]

Mrs. Fisher is fair in presenting her domestic situations, and although she sometimes tries to make them follow some favorite thesis, her conclusions are plausible if not always probable. She makes married life real and gives it substance and color; nor does she neglect the weak, pitiful moments during its course. She is a true educator of the home and is ever aware of its problems.

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[1]Raw Material, "God's Country", p. 215 ff.

Chapter III

"Jes'" Livin'[1]

1. Country Life Versus City Life

Mrs. Fisher is partial to country life. She finds life there altogether wholesome and wholehearted. She advocates the country as a desirable place to live because it is democratic, simple and sincere, beautiful, full of drama and romance, and stimulating.

Country life is hard, extremely so, because its people must continually combat against the elements. Life there, is one of deprivation and severe discipline.

> The life of Hillsboro people is and always has been narrow in the extreme, but their acquaintance with it is extensive.[2]

They have few books; little art; a rough, crude culture; they know little about the world of cities, but they know life and are kindly toward it. In her Hillsboro People, Mrs. Fisher tries to prove to us that rural people are less afflicted by disease, moral lassitude, and despair than urban people.

Country life is far more democratic than city life because people are so spread out and apart. They meet fewer people and grow "hungry

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[1]Simple Martin says of the people in Hillsboro, "We jes' live." See Hillsboro People, p. 5.

[2]Ibid., p. 9.

for folks." Of the people whom they meet, the greater per cent are acquaintances. Many of us, with Mrs. Fisher, have marked the leisure of rural people; they always have time to talk with a neighbor, and are always interested in little incidents of his life. In the country, the soul is imbrued with the bigness and freedom of the great out-of-doors.[1] Mr. Rankin[2] took to the woods in order to escape social popularity--seeking out a place where he could be himself, live and work as he pleased, even be queer if he wished. Neale Crittenden[3] found among the hills a new stimulus to life, and a new work. He lived the life of an individual rather than being a cog in a great machine. Austin Page[4] found nature alive, vigorous, fascinating and free; a drink from which would satisfy a thirsty soul. Mr. Warren found in gardening a freedom from materialism and sophistication; and it gave life a richness for him which he had forgotten was possible.[5]

Mrs. Fisher holds up the Basque people of the Pyrenees, as the most democratic of rural peoples. She says:

> They have kept their racial individuality alive--strong, simple, warm-heated, physically sound and comely, above all life loving--while other races and social organizations around them have risen and fallen. They have never had a kind, a tyrant; an aristocracy or a revolution, and have never, altho hot-blooded and impulsive, taken a single aggressive step against a neighbor in warfare--this is the heart of Europe.[6]

1.Very much in evidence in Hillsboro People.
2Character in The Squirrel-Cage.
3Character in The Brimming Cup.
4Character in Bent Twig.
5Real Motive, "A Sleep and A Forgetting", p. 61 ff.
6Delineator, May, 1928.

When asked what the people of the hills do all the time away from the world, Simple Martin replies, "Why we jes' live."[1] What more could anyone desire than that? Country life is so simple, so natural and human. It is this sincerety which Mrs. Fisher sees as the second great recommendation for rural life. Country people are little influenced by false cultures and fads. If fads do reach them, they can hardly be considered as such. Rural folks live a practical, busy life; at no time are they free from the rounds of planting and harvesting. They rise early, eat heartily, work hard, sleep soundly. On their food the taste of the soil still lingers. Their diet is simple, due to necessity--there are too few hands, and too slender purses to live luxuriously or even extravangantly.

The country provides living, wholesome beauty. Piper Tim says:

> . . . just how lovely things are if we can but open our eyes to them, and take time from the ugly business of livin' to hear them, and yet a place quiet enough to see what it means.[2]

Here and there Mrs. Fisher calls our attention to the clear-transparency of the morning, the silvery dew pearls on the tips of the red-twigged osiers, the pussy-willows gleaming gray along the margins of swampy places, the pulsings of life in all growing things, and the still beauty when the:

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[1] Hillsboro People, p. 5.
[2] Ibid., p. 308.

> . . . moon is like gold and the fog comes up in puffs like incense in the church, an' the valleys all brightwi' lamps like the sky wi' stars;[1]

or when in the quiet changes of twilight:

> The sun was dripping into the sea, now emblazoning the sky with a last flaming circle of pure color, but the light had left the dusky edges of the world. Already the far mountains were dimmed, and the plain passing from deep twilight color to another more sombre, was quietly sinking into darkness as into the loving arms of ultimate dissolution.[2]

Surely the urban beauty of artificial plants, flowers, and light cannot compare with the beauty of the real things. Rural beauty is not confined to space--'tis everywhere.

Marise Allen as a little girl in France felt that there were in the world:

> No windows except those opening on what was physically sickening and coarse, no doors save those leading back and forth between the deadly familiarity of imprisoning rooms.[3]

Many city dwellers have an outlook with no greater breadth than that.

The drama of human life is far more interesting and fascinating than drama on the stage. Life in books is faded in comparison to real life. Mrs. Fisher says of the inhabitants of Hillsboro:

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[1] Hillsboro People, p. 307.

[2] The Brimming Cup, p. 21.

[3] Rough-Hewn, p. 135.

> All novels appear to us badly written, they are faded and faint in comparison to the brilliant colors of life which palpitate up and down our quiet, village street, called by strangers, a sleepy little village.[1]

Mrs. Fisher does not overlook the roughness and boisterousness of country life. She does not find in this, nor their crudeness any mark of discredit but rather an evidence of living life in its fullest. To live all over is one of the desired ends of Mrs. Fisher's labors.

> Folks that die all over die happy. If ye spend yer time half dyin', some day ye'll turn in and die all over 'thought rightly meanin' 'ter at all--jes' a kind of habit ye've got yerself inter.[2]

The romance of the soil and of growing things keeps the heart young in spite of the buffetings of elements and the austerity of rural life. City folks keep their faces soft and young, but their hearts get old from the limitations of walls, and walls, and walls. Even when he was an old rheumantic man, the romance of the pines inspired old piper Tim so that he felt like a boy:

> He took his pipes under his arm and fairly ran up the path. His rheumatic legs creaked a little but the color came up hard in his tired old face as the twilight of the pines and their pungent, unwelcoming breath fell about him.[3]

Mrs. Fisher recommends country life everywhere because she has found in the Vermont hills such spontaneity and joy in living. She

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[1] Hillsboro People, p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 49.

[3] Ibid., p. 314

finds the life of the Basque people very nearly ideal. It is not the fairy, dream life of the Celtic people, nor yet the hard, practical, materialistic life of the French. Mrs. Fisher pictures these people as being hard-working, thrifty farmers and fishermen, who find great joy in just living.[1] Their lives may not be as barren as those of many of the people of the Vermont Hills, but they carry that same pure, cleansed feeling which is similar to that experienced by Sylvia Marshall after her scrubbing with yellow lye soap and cold, spring water:

> She was chilled and raw with the crude astringency of the soap, but she felt cleansed to the marrow of her bones, as though there had been some mystic quality in the lustration of running water performed under the open sky. The racy, black birch twang still lying on her tongue was a flavor quite in harmony with the severely washed feeling. It was a taste notably clean.[2]

In passing comments upon the attitude of city people toward the country, Mrs. Fisher says they cannot understand how it could appeal to anyone:

> They cannot conceive the bittersweet, vital taste of that consciousness as we villagers have it; they cannot understand how arid their existence seems to us without this unhurried, penetrating realization of their own existence and of the meaning of their acts. We do not blame city dwellers for not having it; we ourselves lose it when we venture into their maelstrom . . . but we cannot feel ourselves live. We hurry back to the shadow of Hemlock Mountain feeling that to love life one does not need to be what is usually called happy, one needs only to live.[3]

1Delineator, CXII, (May, 1928), p. 16-17.

2The Bent Twig, p. 304.

3Hillsboro People, pp. 516.

The following poem expresses Mrs. Fisher's attitude toward rural life:

Palaces grow in the cities,
    Tho' tenements back of them hide;
But homes grow in the little towns,
    And dot the countryside.

Wealth grows in the cities,
    Tho' poverty dogs his heel;
But friendship grows in the little towns
    Where folks have time to feel.

It's pleasant to play in the cities
    Where gayety gains renown;
But when it comes to living
    I'll pick me a little town![1]

"Mrs. Fisher drills far below the austere, barren surface of the New England character and discloses unsuspected springs and fountains of emotion".[2] An article in The Outlook for July 7, 1915, says of Mrs. Fisher's Hillsboro People:

[In this book we have]

> . . . humor in its most charming effedt, pathos, elusive and unforeseen, picturesque views of Vermont hills, bringing balsam fragrance with them, and a depth of neighborly understanding and insight into humanity, noble and frail alike.

Furthermore the writer of this article says that this humor, pathos, neighborly understanding and insight into humanity:

> . . . make this book of village tales worthy of a prominent place on the short shelf of treasured tales about"our folks."

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[1]Marjorie F.W., "My Choice".
[2]Review of Reviews, LI (May 1915), p. 631.

2. Where to Find Neighbors

It does not greatly surprise us that Mrs. Fisher lays special stress upon neighborliness: she is always very much interested in humanity, both individually and collectively. Mary Ross, in speaking of Mrs. Fisher's novel, "Her Son's Wife, calls it a "neighbor's novel";[1] and certainly the stories in Raw Material, The Real Motive, Hillsboro People and Home Fires in France might be called neighbor stories--they having been born from incidents in the lives of Mrs. Fisher's neighbors in America and France.

Rural communities are the most neighborly. Mrs. Fisher makes us feel that this spirit of friendliness redeems rural life from many of its shortcomings. In it there is plenty of hard work often little money, but there are always folks. The people who live in the country are as conscious of other lives as they are of their own. "Good fences do not make good neighbors;"[2] nor do French walls. Good neighbors do not like people near that they may shut them out, but rather they crave to know human life. Mrs. Fisher explains the difference in attitude between city and country people; she says that city people become:

> . . . dwarfed by overwhelming numbers and shriveled by the incapacity to "sense" the humanity of the countless human similacra.[3]

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[1] Nation, CXXIII, Sept. 15, 1926, p. 248.
[2] Frost, Robert, North of Boston, "Mending Wall."
[3] Hillsboro People, p. 6.

Mrs. Fisher is thoroughly humanistic in her attitude toward life; personally she is interested in people and finds in them the real stimulus to life. She feels that city people miss so much of life because they are so busy with things and so tired of strange faces.

> City dwellers make money, make reputations (good or bad) make museums and subways, make charitable institutions, make with hysteric rapidity like excited spiders, more and more complication in the mazy labyrinths of their lives but they never make each other's acquaintance . . . and that is all that is worth doing in the world.[1]

She continues defining the restlessness of urban people. They think it is for excitement, for adventure and try to find a satisfaction in theatre scenes, pictures, and books, and other means of amusement. These things may be interesting and well for us to use but at their best they are only bloodless substitutes for life--without humanity they are nothing. People seek:

> . . . to be entertained when their souls crave for human life. . . If they cannot get it fresh, they will take it canned, which is undoubtedly good for those in the canning business.[2]

Country villages are strongly condemned for their petty gossip, which is without doubt justifiable. Gossip exists everywhere and is very much the same whether it be spread by the loafers at the corner grocery or in a ladies drawing room.

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[1]Ibid., p. 6.
[2]Ibid., p. 9.

> We all know about everybody and everything you know. If you live in the country you're really married to humanity . . . not just on speaking terms with it as you are in the city.[1]

> Every child who runs past the house starts a new story, every old man whom we leave sleeping in the burying-ground by the Necrosebt River is the ending of another.[2]

People who have once enjoyed the warmth of rural life miss its sociability as a vital part of the business of living:

> It does seem good to get back to where there are folks. . . It is like coming into a warmed and lighted room full of friendly faces, after wandering long by night in a forest peopled by flitting shadows. In the phantasmagoric pantomime of the city we forgot that there were so many real people in the world.[3]

This genial, friendly spirit in the end even penetrates the crust of the sophisticated and brings them low. Mrs. Fisher says of college folks who come to Hillsboro:

> After a short stay in Hillsboro, even these conscientious young missionaries of culture turn away from the feeble plots of Ibsen and the tame invention of Barnard Shaw to the really exciting, perplexing and stimulating events in the life of the village grocer.[4]

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[1] The Brimming Cup, p. 37.
[2] Hillsboro People, p. 10.
[3] Ibid., p. 3.
[4] Ibid., p. 12.

3. Achieving True Culture

Mrs. Fisher has travelled among various peoples and studied their cultures. She has met various classes of people both in America and Europe. Mrs. Fisher, herself is cultured in the true, fine sense of the word. She understands and appreciates music, painting, and literature. Her culture is fresh, wholesome, inspirational and sincere. It is like ". . . the secret of a wildflower growing in the sun spicy and free."[1] Mrs. Fisher desires that all mankind have true culture.

Her first point is that our present cultures are too often empty, meaningless, mere form. As a result, we are false, and artificial in our manner. We hear Mrs. Fisher condemning Mrs. Page's world when Austin says of it:

> These folks don't do anything except get up and sit down the right way, and run their voices up and down the scale so their great aunts would faint away to hear them. They haven't any energy left over. If somebody would only write out suitable parts for them to memorize, their parts would be perfect.[2]

If Mrs. Fisher were saying this, she would doubtless omit the part about the "great aunts" since many of them would have been found doing similar things. The following quotation sounds much more like Mrs. Fisher. We are:

> Everlastingly studying something or other, going after culture with such eagerness, bringing it home, hanging it on the walls and turning around to find it has changed to nothing, nothing. How silly. . . ! [3]

[1] The Bent Twig, p. 382.

[2] Ibid., p. 386.

[3] Rough-Hewn, p. 141.

Again we feel the irony with which Mrs. Fisher pictures Sylvia's introduction to society. She gave attention to modulating her voice, holding hands and managing her skirts:

> . . . As did the guests of the hour, she usually had the impression that the conversation was very clever.[1]

It is not very strange, nor irregular that Marise Allen came to the conclusion that only queer people cared for culture or art and they spent a life time caring for those things, only. As Marise grows older and wiser, she comes to realize that culture is not restricted to the queer people.

Mrs. Fisher gives the following warning concerning culture: "Culture is but dust and ashes if the foundations are not well laid."[2] Eugenia Mills spent her entire life trying to assimilate European culture. She succeeded in obtaining an artificial cultural sheål, in the meanwhile thwarting her real personality. She tried to buy it by pieces; and

> Not the richest, sharpest American who ever lived can possess European culture by buying little pieces of it here and there and hanging it on the wall. . . You can't change the fabric of your soul without dying a thousand deaths and knowing a thousand births.[3]

True culture cannot be bought for any paltry sum, but it is a matter of years of growth.

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[1] Rough-Hewn, p. 141.

[2] The Bent Twig, p. 385.

[3] Rough Hewn, p. 369.

Culture must be sincere, but so long as mockery is an accepted part of it, just that long will our culture be warped. Mockery makes us sneer and have only a selfish interest in people. We bow and smirk to those whom we insincerely and momentarily worship.

Marise Allen envied those people whose lives were so arranged:

> . . . that other people [did] all the drudgery and [left] one free to perceive nothing but the beauty and delicacy of existence.[1]

She later discovered that the busy person may have and is far more likely to have an appreciation of living than the idle one. She questions:

> [Does] their entire freedom from drudgery give them a keener sense of the beauty and delicacy of existence? [Are] they more deeply alive because of the ease of their lives?[2]

One glance into the life and culture of Eugenia would have proved that the idle life is empty and vapid. It is a purposeless existence--this following one fad and then another.

When we ask who is responsible for the discouraging condition of our culture, Mrs. Fisher points an accusing finger at us: she says, "Folks have what they want."[3]

> We make them [our cultural standards]. We tolerate and foster a national tradition, unuttered but firmly believed that artistic culture is for women and weaklings, and as a result we get a weak and emasculated culture.[4]

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[1]The Brimming Cup, p. 340.
[2]Ibid., p. 340.
[3]"As the Twig is Bent," Good Housekeeping, LXXV (Sept. '22), p. 133.
[4]Ibid.

True culture must be simple and unaffected. Genuine culture outlasts the elaborate and flashy pretense because it has power and reserve back of it. Culture must be positive, lead to action. It requires an active body and mind and may be had by anyone. Mrs. Fisher finds that people generally lack a sense of cultural values and that our culture is stereotyped rather than democratic.

4. Problems Caused by Money

Mrs. Fisher shows no interest in money except in its influence upon the individual. She often takes us into the land of hard working farmers--the type who make up her next-door neighbors. They are poor because of the scraggly soil which yields up a very scanty living. In spite of their poverty, and their struggle in making a living, according to Simple Martin, theyenjoy it. To "jes' live," here requires unwavering hope and courage. Money is scarce, and their homes are poorly furnished and out of date like that of the Westerner.[1] During hard times they club their mites together to help the unfortunate ones out a bit. Their lives are narrow, but geniality, friendliness, and freedom so pervade the atmosphere that they make life worth living.

We have had a peep into the lives of the poor hill people and have seen how they are happy in spite of their poverty. Mrs. Fisher's attitude toward wealth would indicate that she feels money thwarts happiness rather than promotes it. She sees in its acquisition some-

[1]"The Westerner," Scribners Magazine, XLIX (Feb., 1911), 158-165.

thing else sacrificed. Mr. Warren forgot how to live. He resigned his wealth to his family and lived happily upon a small truck patch.[1] J. Farwell Allen gave up Eva Martin and possible happiness for Wall Street and a girl in a red dress with a pot of gold. The girl in a red dress became to him what a red rag is to a bull. He finds solace only in figures and money. Once Eva Martin's ghost breaks through into his consciousness and we see the happiness which might have been his also the pain caused by his greed.[2] Austin Page[3] gave up his coal fields and won the girl he loved. Felix Morrison[4] married for money and lost the only human being he cared for. Aunt Vic[5] married for money and a life of ease. She became a social parasite and an egotist. Rankin lived happily in the woods while Paul Hollister[6] made himself a slave to success, a regular John Barclay.[7] He finally fell a victim to the machinery of his success. Lydia Emery was sold for wealth and a social position.[8] Sylvia Marshall's fingers were burnt many times by gold.[9]

Mrs. Fisher is sympathetic with the idle rich, she pities them. She pictures them as mental, moral, and physical weaklings. After exhausting the thrills supposed to stimulate a feeling of life, they are

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[1]Real Motive, "A Sleep and A Forgetting", p. 49 ff.
[2]Real Motive, "An Untold Story", p. 241 ff.
3, 4, 5, Characters in The Bent Twig.
[6]The Squirrel-Cage.
[7]Character in W.A. White's A Certain Rich Man.
[8]Heroine of The Squirrel-Cage.
[9]The Bent Twig.

forced to fall back upon their egotism as the only nourishment. Sylvia Marshall's Aunt Vic was that type of a person. Arnold Smith[1] at seventeen was a sophisticated youngster, at twenty-one a mere husk. Mrs. Fisher pities Arnold. He was a victim of circumstances, while Aunt Vic was a victim by choice. Our list of parasites includes Eugenia-- she missed all of life in trying to find it. Mrs. Fisher expresses a wish that:

> We could . . . produce a nation which would be ashamed to have too luxurious or idle life in its borders, as long as there is one starved or oppressed life left.[2]

Mrs. Fisher has a socialistic desire to abolish these classes of people.

Mrs. Fisher brings the restless, greedy American a lesson in living, from her French people. They are satisfied with a comfortable living and do not grasp at every copper or two without considering the cost. The Frenchman lives happily and runs the ancestral shop which is a part of his inheritance.

Mrs. Fisher strikes a note of contrast between the economic attitude of the American and the Frenchman. To us the Frenchman's attitude seems indolent, or at least unambitious. To the Frenchman our perpetual bustling is

> Like a circle of frenzied worshipers around a firey Maloch, into whose man they cast everything that makes life sweet and livable, leisure, love, affection, apprecation of things rare and fine.[3]

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[1]Character in <u>Bent Twig</u>

[2]"As the Twig is Bent", <u>Good Housekeeping,</u> LXXV (Sept. '22), p. 133.

[3]<u>Home Fires in France,</u> "A Fair Exchange," p. 105.

Whether Mrs. Fisher leans favorably toward the Frenchman's opinion we can only guess but at least she allows him to make the weightiest arguments. We feel true horror in the old Frenchman's words when he says:

> For nothing in the world would I enter upon such a life as you depict, owing great sums of money to begin with, for no matter how 'easy' your business credit may be made in the modern world, the fact remains that I should lie down at night and rise up in the morning conscious that thousands of men had entrusted their money to me, that I might easily, by one false step or piece of bad judgment, lose forever money which means life to poor women or old men. It would be my deaith, I who never owed a penny in my life. And then what? Even with the utmost success which you hold out, I should have a life which, compared with what I now have, would be infernal; rushing to and fro over the face of the earth, away from home, my wife, my children . . . constantly employed in the most momentous and important decisions where in order to succeed I must give all of muself, all, <u>all</u>, my brain, my personality, my will power, my soul . . . I should be an empty husk, drained of everything that makes me a living and human being . . . I see from what you so eloquently say that I would have become the slave and not the master of that invention which has come down to me from my fathers; that instead of its furnishing me and my work--people with a quiet, orderly, contented life, I should only exist to furnish it means for a wild, fantastic growth, like something in a nightmare, because a real growth is never like that, never.[1]

"Happiness, at least a satisfaction is possible in human life."[2] To live we need among other things: freedom, an interest in humanity, a true culture, an unmaterialistic attitude toward life. Mrs. Fisher's old Frenchman has sumed up the things which make life worth while. He

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[1] <u>Home Fires in France,</u> "A Fair Exchange", p. 101 & 102.
[2] Rough-Hewn, p. 392.

says:

> My friend, humanity as a whole will never be worth more than individuals are worth, and it takes many, many things to make individuals and their lives worth while. It takes a mixture, and it needs, among other elements, some quiet, some peace, some leisure, some occupation among pure beauty like my roses, and some fellowship with great minds of the past.[1]

[1] Home Fires in France, "A Fair Exchange", p. 105.

Chapter IV

Problems of the World War

1. Mrs. Fisher's War Experience

Mrs. Fisher spent three years, from 1916 to 1919, in active war service. Her war books, Home Fires in France and The Day of Glory, contain incidents from life in France during the war period. Every sketch in Home Fires in France is based upon a real incident, every problem and story from the front is genuine. Mrs. Fisher's home was always open to refugees and she gave freely of comfort and cheer, whether at a camp commissary or in a printing establishment for the blind, and a convalescent home for delicate children.

2. Problems at the Front

Even Mrs. Fisher and those just behind the lines cannot tell us the true horrors of The War. Soldiers were loath to speak of them among themselves, and when speaking with others, they, like M. Amieux,[1] tried to change the subject when it drifted to life in the trenches. Occasionally, someone like Paul Arbagnan, who was so filled with the horrors of the war, would give a summary picture of life at the front.

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[1] Home Fires in France, "Vignettes from Life at the Rear", p. 75 ff.

Paul Arbagnan denounces war as filth and disease--disease because "it demoralizes and eats the heart out of man.[1] He says in speaking of the wounded left dying on the field: "I would willingly give back my Croix de Guerre to forget those mortally wounded which I have left to die."

> . . . because I have orders to select (if my stretcher has not room for all) only those who will get well enough to go back and fight again.[2]

The soldiers were taught to hate and to kill. When asked if he ever met any Germans in close combat, Groissard replies:

> Have I killed many Boches, you mean, Madame?--oh, yes, a good many. We fought all over Mort Homme, you know; and we were in the last attack on Hill 304. There was a great deal of hand to hand work there, of course.[3]

According to Paul Arbagnan it was not hard life; the early risings in the morning, the smoky fires, the meagre breakfasts so much as the damp and cold of the trenches:

> . . . cold, cold day and night, cold that degenerates you till you could sell your soul, your mother's soul to be warm again.[4]

And the fifth! Again we listen to the tired voice of Paul Arbagnan:

1*Home Fires in France*, p. 71.
2Ibid., pp. 71 & 72.
3Ibid., "Vignettes from Life at the Rear," p. 69.
4Ibid., p. 72.

> Do you know what your body is like, what your clothes are like, what your socks are like when you have lived and cooked, and sweat and slept and bled in them twenty-two days? . . . And mind, not clean country, mud, but filth, and up to your eyes and beyond, horrible infected mud splashing upon the emergency bandages you are trying to put on a wound.[1]

These were all problems: the cold, the hunger, the filth, and the hate--but nothing could be done about it: it was war.

The biggest problem of the trenches was getting supplies. They were cut off, ran out, or were lost. Once more Paul Arbagnan leaves a picture for us:

> [All day I squat] the German shells falling one a minute, over my head, my supply of bandages gone, my anaesthetics gone, no cotton, not even a cup of water left. To see them dying there, begging for help, calling for their mothers. . . to crouch there helpless all day long, hearing the shells falling, and wondering which one would come through the roof![2]

Mrs. Fisher dwells longest upon the problems just behind the lines, because they were the most familiar to her--every day for three years she was in the midst of them.

The problem most difficult to solve was the "cafard": a fit of melancholy which were a psychological reaction from the war. It occurred most frequently among the convalescing. Deschamps complained:

> . . . two hundred of us in one great room . . . oh, they [were] kind to us. We had enough to eat. But we [were] not children. It is not enough to have food and a roof--two hundred men there . . . what a life . . . for fourteen months![3]

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[1] Home Fires in France, "Vignettes from Life at the Rear," p. 72.
[2] Ibid., pp. 73 & 74.
[3] Home Fires in France, "Vignettes from Life at the Rear", p. 66.

It is not surprising that the "cafard" visited the soldiers who were mained, disfigured and blind. The blind were troubled most. They had nothing with which to occupy their time except thoughts and visions of what they had seen during the last few months--and such horrible visions they were! The directrices had their hands full caring for the "cafard"; obtaining machinery with which to teach the blind, getting help and instructors; and finding work for the men. There were selfish women like the woman in sables who called to see Auguste Leveau;[1] and Mrs. Wangton, who desired personal honor after which she did not intend to "have to bother anymore about these tiresome war blind."[2]

A second problem was obtaining materials for working--both help and supplies. Silly, young girls who had decided to become martyrs and marry some blind soldier were just another problem to fact rather than an aid in solving one. Yet the directrices had to depend upon volunteered services. Most of the women in charge of camps were un-business-like and having incompetent help were unable to prevent things from drifting into a chaotic condition; too few people, like Ellen Boardman, arrived to set them aright.[3]

Mrs. Fisher shows us some of the sacrifices made by the people behind the lines to help the boys at the front, and to furnish supplies. Ellen Boardman ate apples and rolls instead of dining out. With her few

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[1] Home Fires in France, "Eyes for the Blind", p. 188.
[2] Ibid., p. 189.
[3] Ibid., "A Little Kansas Leaven", p. 132 ff.

extra coins she bought chocolate bars, stationery and sundry other articles for the soldiers as they left the Gare de l'e St. Margaret Moysset,[1] who had lost her child and husband at the outset of the war, gave her small income and her time to feeding orphan children. Occasionally, big hearted people like the Halls, with large incomes would be so touched by the war that they very generously supplied the things most needed.[2]

Mrs. Fisher pictures for us the disheartening life of the invaded regions. The bravery of the women and children was scarcely human.

The motto of the French women, as Mrs. Fisher gives it was: let them (the Germans) capture our bodies, but our souls, never! These women resolved not to show emotion before the Germans although they were robbed of everything, even children and friends. When the Germans took the women, and all the men, who were able to work, up north to Germany, no tears were shed--but the hospitals for the insane were full the next day. Annette Graynon's mother who stayed behind had: "a long fainting spell when Annette went by with a German soldier. We thought we could never bring her to life."[3]

The captive women themselves allowed the Germans no glimpse of the agony in their souls. They marshalled themselves together, keeping clean, teaching one another what they knew, and recooking their food

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[1] Home Fires in France, "A Honeymoon", p. 248 ff.

[2] Ibid., p. 229 ff.

[3] Ibid., "The Permissionnaire", p. 40.

so that they were wholesome, normal women when they returned to their homes. But they never told what they had seen: "If those who escape tell what is seen up there, those who are left suffer worse torments."[1]

Marguerite Moysset, whose little boy died at the beginning of the war and whose husband was killed at the front, started a soup line for orphan children. When a friend offers her sympathy and wonders at her courage, Marguerite replies:

> I? . . . I haven't the right to cry! Look at my neighbors.[2]

The French villages under German rule did not let their patriotism die. They taught their children to sing the "Marseillaise" whenever the German guards slept. Jean Pierrie, aged ten, greets his father with:

> I never saluted! You have to have something on your head to salute, they won't let you do it bareheaded, so I threw my cap into the fire![3]

Mrs. Fisher endeavors to show the attitude of the French and German people toward one another. They may have loathed one another, but they did not hate permanently. The pseudo-German and his men who invaded Madame Brismantier's house, demanded that she cook them a good meal, drank her wine, stole everything of value in her house, made kindling out of her furniture, and strewed her home with filth. After their retreat Madeline returned to the shop, the store of medicines

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[1] Ibid., "The Refuge", p. 112.
[2] Ibid., "A Honeymoon", p. 250.
[3] Home Fires in France, "The Permissionnaire", p. 36.

which she had hidden in the cellar and she herself took charge of her husband's pharmacy. Soeur Ste. Marie calls upon her to furnish medicine for the wounded soldiers of the Germans.[1] Paulette, the Permissionaire's wife, speaks sympathetically of the German soldiers:

> Their officers were, hard on them about everything--hard! They treated them like dogs. We were sorry for them sometimes.[2]

Again when speaking of their heartless thieving, she says:

> But the Boches didn't dare not to. Their officers would have shot them if they hadn't.[3]

The French mothers and their children lived scantily in those days. The Germans ate all they could, took along what they could not eat, and destroyed all that they could not dispose of by the first two methods.[4] Food was not only high but scarcely available. Paulette (Nidart's wife) and her family lived upon dry bread, a few potatoes and a little thin soup.[5] The Germans left Madeline with only a little tapioca and sugar. The proud Madeline was forced to go and beg from the farmer's wife who usually furnished her poultry and fresh eggs.[6]

After the war had swept across France, the few persons left (mostly women and children) struggled at the reconstruction. The

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[1] Ibid., "La Pharmacienne", p. 292 ff.

[2] Home Fires in France, "The Permissionnaire", p. 38.

[3] Ibid., p. 39

[4] Ibid., p. 27

[5] Ibid., p. 44.

[6] Ibid., p. 50.

night that Nidart returned home, he saw:

> . . . poor and miserable under that pale, good light, a wretched ant-like procession issuing from the holes in the ground and filing slowly along the scarred road toward the ruins; women; a few old men; a little band of pale and silent children. They approached the ruins and dispersed.[1]

The French people are very proud of their homes. Nothing the Germans could have done would cause more heartache than harm to their home or family. The soldiers at the front could not believe that anything could happen to them:

> Those north-country-men! There is no use saying a word to them. They won't believe that their homes and families aren't there till they see with their own eyes . . . and when they do see . . . I've heard that some of the men in the front regiments that followed up the Boches' retreat across the devastated regions, went crazy when they found their own villages.[2]

The Germans devastated everything. First they stole everything of value--every bit of brass and copper, then next the linen, then the wool.

> Alice Bernard's mother, they jerked her mattress right out from under her and left her dying on the bed ropes. And Mr le Cure, he was sick with pneumonia and they took his, that he died.[3]

They pried off window cases and door jambs, and hacked the furniture into kindling. They cut trees and vines off at the roots:

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[1] Home Fires in France, "The Permissionnaire", pp. 33 and 34.
[2] Ibid., p. 28.
[3] Ibid., pp. 38 and 39.

> . . . a ray of yellow sunshine struck ironically through the prone branches of murdered trees.[1]

The people thought anyone was a fool to give up. Nidart, when he came home on a furlough found his home in ruins. He worked day and night reconstructing the home and planting his few acres:

> Almost at the end of his strength after the long continued strained effort to accomplish the utmost in every moment and every hour, he shivered from the cold of his wet garments as he stood for a moment, fumbling to reach the pruning shears. But he did not give himself the time to warm himself at the fire, setting out directly again in the rain. He had been working at top speed ever since breakfast, six hours before of black coffee and dry bread." [2]

Some men were less fortunate then Nidart, in having their family and a bit of home left. Deschamps was one of these. He spent the remainder of his life entertaining the "cafard".

3. War Problems in America

We hear little from Mrs. Fisher of America's problems during the war, but she does give us a glimpse of the boys back home again. Every community had its blind, mained and discouraged. The boys were humored and petted. Mrs. Fisher had experienced enough of the war to be able to understand how the bous felt after their return and she sympathized with them. She realized how much they scorned pity and being babied after a hard life at the front:

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[1] Home Fires in France, "The Permissionnaire". p. 50.
[2] Ibid., p. 52.

> He sickened and shivered at the thought of the glances of pitying comprehension with which they probably accompanied their never varying soft answers.[1]

Instead of coddling they needed to be allowed to work and forget. Louis, the blind soldier,[2] disliked being watched and entertained because it continually reminded him of his misfortune. When forgotten a moment he slipped away to his bed of ferns and their quiet to regain a new hold upon life, and be honest with himself:

> He must stop hating, and raging, must stop pretending to be hard, when he must at least be honest with himself, must face what there was to face, must say out the word he had never dared to say to his heart altho his proud lips had brought it out many times, when he must announce to his terrified heart: 'I am blind. What does it mean to be blind?'[3]

He finds consolation in a bit of wholesome philosophy, which was quite in keeping with Mrs. Fisher's idea that we can make a success of our lives if we will. We hear Louis say:

> Our senses are not ourselves; we are not our senses. No, they are the instruments of our understanding. To be blind means that I have one less instrument than other men. But a man with a telescope has one more than other men, and is life nothing to them because of that! . . poor, imperfect as it is we make our life, we make our life.[4]

Mrs. Fisher pictures the agony of parents who stayed at home while their sons were being sacrificed to the great Moloch:

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[1]Home Fires in France, "The First Time After", p. 196.

[2]Ibid., p. 194 ff.

[3]Ibid., p. 201

[4]Ibid., pp. 201 and 202.

> The man whom the twentieth century forced to march away, to kill and be killed.[1]

When Marise Crittenden cries out with all the agony of a mother's heart we can readily believe that this is an expression from Mrs. Fisher's heart:

> No, oh no! I couldn't live through another. To see them all go, husbands and sons! Not another war! Let me live quickly, somehow, to get it over with . . . and die before it comes.[2]

4. Mrs. Fisher's Attitude Toward War

Mrs. Fisher is too much a patron of growth and progress to wish to see a repetition of the manslaughter of the recent war. She probes deeper than definitions, she seeks causes--here she finds not greed, nor selfishness but a new idea:

> Perhaps all the world is now trying to give birth to a new idea which we have talked of but never felt before, the idea that all of us, each of us is responsible for what happiness to all, to each, that we must stick together for good.[3]

For this idea is like

> . . . a little, new body . . . It has cost agony; and is so small, so weak, so needing all our protection. . . and then also, because. . . because it is alive, because it will grow.[4]

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[1] Ibid., "Vignettes from Life at the Rear", p. 62.

[2] The Brimming Cup, p. 126.

[3] Home Fires in France, "Vignettes from Life at the Rear," p. 75.

[4] Ibid., p. 75.

This new idea, though small and weak, Mrs. Fisher seemingly considers worthy; worth lives, money, and sorrow. But Mrs. Fisher felt that we fought and sacrificed not only to sustain it, but to make it grow. We note Mrs. Fisher's optimism, not only a hope of progress but a firm belief that it will come. The war brought with it many problems, the facing of which required untold bravery and courage. They are gone now, almost forgotten; but the ideal of a better world lives on.

Chapter V

Problems of Education

1. Mrs. Fisher's Educational Experience

Mrs. Fisher is well known among educators. She has been active in educational interests: as a writer, a state school commissioner, with the war blind, and as a mother. Mrs. Fisher aims to attack education wherein it does not promote man's interests. She revolts at our dead school system: it lacks purpose and appropriateness. It is a medevial institution in a modern world, what we would term a back number. Our educational system has not kept pace with our civilization as a whole. Mrs. Fisher is well aware of our educational needs. She touches all fields of education: that of the child, the youth and the adult. Her investigations show thorough study and a comprehension of our educational situation. Without question, Mrs. Fisher's work as a state school commissioner gave her great insight into this field.

The first essentials of education are a desire and a capacity for knowledge. Mrs. Fisher finds desire and capacity plentiful where there has not been too much educational tampering. Her investigations reveal a tendency among our schools, to destroy intellectual curiosity. Mrs. Fisher agrees with R.H. Tawney that:

> The achievements of education are to be measured by its success in assisting growth, not in imposing discipline or imparting information.[1]

What would our ancestors say to such a definition, and what difficulties would need to be overcome to establish an educational program upon this basis even today! We talk, yes, but what we actually do is to impose discipline and impart information. Such an education hardly means a fulfillment of the meaning education--a training of muscles, nerves and brain.

2. Educational Problems of the Child

Mrs. Fisher shows greater sympathy with children, and greater understanding of them than of adults. Her books in this field number five. The Independent for July 3, 1916, speaks of Mrs. Fisher as a "child expert"; again we hear her referred to as, "an enthusiastic partisan of the child's world".[2] Indeed, she shows an extensive knowledge of child psychology. Mrs. Fisher's child characters are more human than any of her other characters. She has a very complete understanding of the child's mind:

> Now, if mother had asked her if she had planned to stop at Aunt Hetty's, of course, she'd have to say yes, she had planned to, sort of but not quite.[3]

Here is another example in which we see her picturing the child's mind. Neale Crittenden, as a boy, disliked going to the theatre:

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 87.
[2] Independent, LXXV (March 6, 1913), p. 540.
[3] The Brimming Cup, p. 67.

> How could anybody be expected to prefer to dress up in things you had to try to keep clean, sit in a dark hot theatre and watch painted up men and women carry on like all possessed about things that weren't really so.[1]

Mrs. Fisher points out four things which child education should accomplish: it should develop personality and individuality; teach democracy; create self-reliance; and give training in industry.[2]

Education begins at home. The first buddings of personality and individuality appear while the child is still at home with his mother. The initial step is under the mother's guidance. Mrs. Fisher charges the mother first, to understand the child. Mrs. Fisher gives us one of Doctor Montessori's maxims to remember in our dealings with children. It is "Every child differs from another and from himself from day to day."[3] The mother who nags at her children because they are not like some other children needs to repeat this over a hundred times a day until she believes and practices it. Mothers and teachers, too, forget that a child is very flexible and unstable. They often overlook the fact that one child differs from another in disposition, tastes and other characteristics. This parental mistake is a permanent unkindness to the child in that it curbes his personality and thwarts his individuality. Mrs. Fisher considers that, "Unnecessary restraint in a child's life is a crime."[4] Unnecessary restraint means warped personalities, and personality is what is most worth cultivating.

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[1] Rough-Hewn, p. 20.

[2] Montessori Mother, p. 53. Mrs. Fisher classes child education as physical and spiritual. The physical education consists of training and coordinating muscles, brain and nerves. In her discussion which follows she speaks of the need for training in self-reliance, industry, democracy, and enriching the childs personality.

[3] Montessori Manual, p. 18.

[4] Montessori Mother, p. 140.

Parents and teachers overlooking this maxim convert personalities into monstrosities.

Both personality and individuality are greatly influenced by the imagination. Imagination makes personality glow if properly directed and encourated, and it makes any person, child or adult, more individual and creative. Mrs. Fisher counsels us not to thwart and smother childish imaginations because small children can not distinguish reality from imagination.[1] If a child calls a dog a bear or tells his mother that he has seen twenty frogs hanging by their tails to the barbs of a wire, nothing which the mother can say can convince him that he has only imagined these things and that they are not really so. Parents often call these imaginings lies and punish children for reporting them as fact. It is small wonder that teachers find pupils as void of imagination and that the world is full of people without originality.

A mother should make her training as democratic as reason and judgment will allow. Mrs. Fisher says: 'the duty of a mother and teacher is to stimulate the child's natural desire to learn.'[2] The child is filled with curiosity which unfolds with the child's own growth. The busy, impatient mother often finds this curiosity annoying and thus injures the child's mental alertness. Every mother should be a stimulus to her children and encourage in them an interest in gaining knowledge. "The mother's mind must be alert and ingenious to supplant the child's mind as it grows."[3]

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[1] Mothers and Children, p. 32 ff.
[2] The Montessori Manual, p. 23.
[3] Ibid., p. 23.

Mrs. Fisher finds through her investigations that a mother may stimulate a child's mental growth by being democratic in her attitude toward him. She recommends that every mother be a Casa dei Bambini teacher--or perhaps we should call her a guide--makes it her policy to discover the child's natural cravings and help the child to satisfy them. Sometimes this craving is for action, again it is for knowledge. In any case, there are likely to be questions. To question is natural for a healthy, normal child and every parent or teacher should appreciate and respect the child enough to help him. Many of these questions concern the actions of adults and facts of everyday living--something the child needs to know, and hence the child's questions need to be answered. Mrs. Fisher commands us to answer them or if we cannot "go hand in hand with the child to the source of information."[1] A thumbed, dog's-eared encyclopedia that opens with a meek limpness and lies flat open at any page with broken backed submission,"[2] is recommended to any family--"a certificate of honor to any parent."[3] A democratic mother will learn and be reasonable with her child and be reasonable in her dealings with him. Mrs. Fisher tells us that even a very small child can reasonabout some things; and as frequently as possible the mother should make use of that ability. The reasoning parent can prevent many breaks with the child and avoid many an act of disobedience. Mrs. Fisher says that disobedience usually dates back to parents demanding unreasonable things of their children; for instance, requiring

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[1] Mothers and Children, p. 57.
[2] Ibid., p. 55.
[3] Ibid., p. 55.

that a small child should sit still for fifteen minutes when every part of him is eager for action. When we ask the impossible of a child he does not mind because he cannot--this is his first disobedience. Mrs. Fisher fels that if parents understand their children the first disobedience would not occur. If the habit of disobeying has been formed, even then we should not multiply. . . the occasions when the mother's will and the will of the child come into collision."[1] The reasonable parent seeks causes and results that are permanent and satisfactory. Thus the method of training becomes positive, and positiveness according to Mrs. Fisher is the chief requirement in successful child training.

Mrs. Fisher believes that children pass through certain stages of development, as the folding, sewing, and cutting periods. During these periods the child should follow his natural bent, being permitted to cut, sew and fold as he wills. If old articles are furnished for this purpose it will satisfy the child and save some of mother's best linens. Locking up and moving all articles which he could use only makes the mother a great deal of unnecessary work and makes the child irritable because he very much desires something he cannot have. Mrs. Fisher suggests:

> Why not remove the temptation from them positively by giving them plenty of paper and rags to cut when they are seen to have scissors in their hands rather than negatively by hanging the scissors out of their reach![2]

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[1] Mothers and Children, p. 160.

[2] Ibid., p. 157.

The schools are not a whit more democratic in training the child than are the parents. At the present time, the schools are ruled by standardization. The rate of progress made by each child is determined by law, and in no instance is an allowance made for individual differences. Every child of the fifth grade must study reading, classics, geography, English, physiology, arithmetic, spelling and writing--the brighter child progressing no more rapidly than the dullest in the class. The bright boy who loathes classics and reading is forced through them because he must take them. We hear the statement made that he needs those subjects which he does not enjoy for discipline's sake. Standardization is in a larger part responsible for the bright child's bad study habits and loss of interest. Mrs. Fisher condemns our schools, from the kindergarten onward, in that they crush out the child as an individual and try to fashion him after their pattern of an ideal student.

Mrs. Fisher's defense of the little one roomed country schoolhouse as an educational institution is surprising in this age of consolidated schools. If they are to be saved, Mrs. Fisher's support is timely. The little country school-house is hardly in accord with big cities, big business, and automobiles travelling at eighty or one-hundred miles an hour. Mrs. Fisher defends the rural schools in that they are democratic. They allow the children freedom, space and air--but more than that, the children in them escape the herding necessary in large schools. Mrs. Fisher says:

> I am genuinely alarmed about the results (twenty-five years from now) if we go on massing children in hordes.[1]

[1]Self-Reliance, Editor's Introduction, p. v.

In her book, Self-Reliance, Mrs. Fisher points out that the limitation of the small rural school is its scanty equipment. She feels that with the necessary equipment country schools would be most efficient, more so than our large city schools.

Mrs. Fisher attributes the decrease in our school numbers, whatever the ban of compulsary attendance is removed, to the undemocratic methods of our schools:

> A large number of children quit school and go to work because school is intolerable to them.[1]

Sometimes grades, prizes, and various mechanical methods to induce children to study arouse a superficial and temporary interest; but learning under such conditions is of no permanent good. Mere mechanical means cannot correct a fault in our educational system and give new life to a warped curiosity. Mrs. Fisher suggests democracy of the curriculum to supplant standardization. Her attitude is Montessorian, that is, the teacher's duty is to discover and direct rather than to force and compel. Mrs. Fisher considers that our schools need to teach less and permit the children to learn more. We are trying to "learn children" rather than teach them. Mrs. Fisher's hypothesis is, that in order for the child to learn, education must be attractive. She follows Dr. Montessori in her belief that, "Children prefer education if given the proper conditions"[2]--in other words, this means that for a child to be interested in education he must follow his own bent:

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[1]Why Stop Learning, p. 201.

[2]The Montessori Manual, p. 23.

> He does not, he cannot learn at all, anything if he is not interested.[1]

This would mean that the child study only those things which he liked best. It is hardly conceivable that such a plan would work out as effectively in real life as it seems it should. Children form mental prejudices about certain studies which they will not like because they have decided that they will not. The fact that a child does not care for geometry hardly seems an adequate excuse for his not trying to get a knowledge of it. An education is to train us for life--a purely elective course may not do that but would in all probability produce a badly spoiled generation.

In the Casa dei Bambini, Mrs. Fisher pictures the ideal school. It is purely democratic. The maxim for this school is freedom, space and air. The children are permitted to rove at will, to talk, and to select their own tasks. Mrs. Fisher accredits the diligent way in which these little folk work to the democratic way in which they are taught. The Casa dei Bambini is based upon the belief that: "All growth must come from the voluntary action of the child himself." It is hard for us, brought up under the present educational system of America to put much faith in Dr. Montessori's method. Mrs. Fisher says that she felt the same skepticism and contempt but a personal investigation was sufficient to convince her that Dr. Montessori had established a democratic child's school which was a success. There

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[1] A Montessori Mother, p. 94.
[2] The Montessori Manual, p. 20.

is no supervision or standardization in the Cases dei Bambini. Mrs. Fisher does not approve of supervision because:

> . . . supervision is meddling . . . one does a child a real injury in correcting a mistake which, with a little more time and experience, he would have been able to correct for himself.[1]

The Casa dei Bambini does not include in its procedure a formal recitation. All recitation comes spontaneously from the child. Dr. Montessori's apparatus is simple but is planned with purpose and forethought; each piece is to provoke expression, reasoning, and muscular flexibility. The child assumes his own responsibility in that he assigns his own tasks; and having chosen what he most desires to do, he is usually bent upon reaching the conclusion. This sytem is made up of projects, "educational puzzles", Mrs. Fisher calls them. The working out of these projects requires energy, ingenuity, and concentration. They necessitate a coordination of muscles and brain. The apparatus is adapted to the child's mental, development and graduated according to his rate of progress. The child choses the project which he will work out. Mrs. Fisher, after investigating Dr. Montessori's method, feels that it is the ideal way to teach children. She has tried to encourage the adoption of the Montessori system, or one similar to it in American homes and school systems. She finds in it the solution for many of our educational difficulties in that it makes allowance for the child's natural endowment and rate of progress. "He will not pay the least attention to anything that is not suitable to him."[2]

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[1]A Montessori Mother, p. 101.

[2]Athenaeum, (Mr. 1, 1913), p. 234.

Second, it requires that the teacher or parent satisfy a persistant and steady desire for something because it is:

> . . . the expression of some need and ought to be satisfied.[1]

Third, the attitude of the Casa dei Bambini teacher is the proper attitude for parents and teachers. She discovers and directs the child's interests like an unseen hand:

> She is only trying to find out what his natural interest is, so that she may pounce upon it and utilize it for teaching him without his knowing it.[2]

According to Mrs. Fisher's testimony, the Casa dei Bambini is successful in holding the child's interest in spite of the continual movement and talking (never loud). The children develop habits of concentration and mental poise. Although the Casa dei Bambini is not ideal, it is superior to most American schools, by reason of its quiet, order, space and cleanliness; the simple, complete and effective equipment; and above all the democracy of the teaching methods. It furnishes a striking contrast to America's system in which children are seated for several hours, at intermission bursting forth to expend their pent-up nervous energy in vigorous play. Their tasks may be less homely than those assigned the children of the Casa dei Bambini, but they are no more interesting and much less practical or thought provoking.

A third goal of education is training the child to be self-

1"Aren't you Glad you're Not Your Grandmother", Good Housekeeping, LXXIV (April, 1922), p. 168.

2A Montessori Mother, p. 98.

reliant. The purpose of education is to enable us to better-living. Self-reliance is essential for the adult to meet his problems with readiness and good judgment. Mrs. Fisher emphasizes that a self-reliant adult develops from a self-reliant child. Children must be given opportunities to do things for themselves:

> From the earliest year, modern children need be set in conditions in which they learn for themselves that lasting satisfaction comes from a wise employment of their energies and capacities and not from a passive ownership of things.[1]

Children need to make their own toys and entertain themselves; such activity stimulates their creative genius and is far more fascinating for them than a game of some kind brought home from the store. The crudeness of the toys in no wise lessens the child's pleasure in them. Ready made articles kill the initiative. Imaginative resourcefulness is valuable to both children and adults. Small labors about the home as well as making their own toys develop resourcefulness. There are many small tasks which children can do and find pleasure in doing: keeping their toys gathered up, answering the telephone, and even mending their own clothes--although they may not be done as neatly as the mother might desire. Mrs. Fisher advises the impatient mother to keep hands off. She says:

> If anyone in charge of little children can acquire the habit of invariable and disinterested inquiry into the intentions of small people, the rest almost follows of itself. As a rule the child's intentions are good and

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[1]*Self-Reliance*, p. 10.

> all that remains to be done is to help the tots carry them out in a way that will not be too troublesome to the family.[1]

Many mothers close all ways of activity for the child:

> If you will spend one day in watching a healthy child of eighteen or twenty months you will come to the conclusion that he is straining every nerve to learn how to "do for himself" and his mother is straining every nerve to prevent him, except in certain ways now stereotyped.[2]

The child learns by doing. His first efforts may not be successful; until he asks for help he needs none. Mrs. Fisher points out that the adult's ways are not always the child's ways. She advocates giving the child responsibility: "Responsibility,--there is the magic key to the door we are trying to open to our children."[3]

Both parents and teachers are responsible for making self-reliant men and women of children. They should remember that "there is no beginning for the habit of self help than the consistant training of the capacity for it."[4]

Mrs. Fisher gives two reasons why this rule should be kept in mind. 1. "Emotion which finds no outlet in action is unwholesome and delibitating;"[5] and 2. "Suppressed desires (by external forces) are dangerous factors in human lives."[6] Mrs. Fisher would like to see self-reliance receive greater emphasis in both school and home

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[1]Self-Reliance, p. 17.

[2]Ibid., p. 19.

[3]Self Reliance, p. 41.

[4]Ibid., p. 25.

[5]Ibid., p. 102.

[6]Ibid., p. 102.

training, as in the Casa dei Bambini. Here the children are given practical, purposeful problems by means of which they " . . . learn how to go deftly through all the ordinary operations of daily life."[1] Their hands, and minds are closely coordinated with living. In only a few instances has this been done in our school system, the most notable of which is the Park School.[2] In this school every child has his hobby to which he devotes himself like a slave. The success of this school is a proof of Mrs. Fisher's educational pudding--democratic education. The purpose of the school is to educate the child for life; to use his faculties in meeting situations.

Mrs. Fisher's discussions present self-reliance largely from the mother's point of view, rather than of the teacher. Mothers and Children and The Montessori Mother are addressed to the mother; also for the most part, Self Reliance returns to the home.

A fourth problem of our educational system is to train children to be industrious. A mother who relieves the child of all responsibility does the child a great injury: she encourages him to be indolent and loses an opportunity to develop self-reliance. Self-reliance and industry are unseparable. Industry may be encouraged in children by allowing them to do the reasonable things which they desire to do and also by assigning them small tasks about the home. If the parents are reasonable and tactful in giving children something to do they will do it with alacrity. The most striking feature of the Casa dei Bambini is the industrious way in which the children work--they work

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[1] A Montessori Mother, p. 146.

[2] Self-Reliance, p. 108 ff. This school is located in Boston, Mass.

because they enjoy it.

The adult forms a large star in the child's world. He is guide and pattern, and he determines the child's attitude toward life:

> The child is a traveller in a strange and wonderful country taking in through every flexible, new sense a thousand fresh impressions of the great adventure of life and formulating more and more clearly with every day's advance into the new country what shall be his attitude toward it.[1]

Again Mrs. Fisher speaks of the importance of our duty as adults to children:

> What we are called upon to (do is to) help each plant, each child into the most perfect speciman possible of that creature to which he belongs and not try to turn him into another type.[2]

3. Education of the Youth

The problem of youth during high school and college days are largely social and intellectual. These have their origin back in kindergarten and the elementary school, with a greater emphasis upon social life as the youth develops a complete social consciousness. The youth who has not been taught industry and self-reliance during his grammar school days will never develop them. The stinted personalities will result in stinted lives. If the early home training has been undemocratic the children will also be undemocratic. Those

[1] Mothers and Children, p. 219.
[2] Ibid., p. 179.

children who have not been allowed to develop self-reliance cannot make great social nor intellectual progress. The high school age is the most impressionable period of a child's life, with:

> The hard, protective husk of his little boyhood. . . so newly sloughed off, that his adolescence had as yet received scarcely a mark upon its freshness of impression. Ready now, responsive with an upward quiver to a whole range of experience to which he had been blind and deaf before, . . . catching up from the chance materials about him the stuff with which to construct his new world.[1]

Mrs. Fisher is especially interested in the intellectual growth of the youth. Shd sees in it a means of social and physical progress. Her investigations prove that instead of enriching the youth's curiosity we make him stoical. Our educational system does not allow sufficient time for original thinking and activity. Mrs. Fisher says that Neale Crittenden learned: "to acquire and pigeon-hole information and a perfect dormant personality".[2] One great trouble with our education is the "Hadley" ideal:

> . . . grinding and polishing wheels of that well appointed educational mill at work on the corners of [the students] individuality, bent on turning out the fifty young seniors smooth and identical, the perfection of the Hadley type.[3]

Our educational system is a ~~mere~~ goose stuffing preformance. Such an overdose of what someone else thinks permits the child to have few opinions of his own and he soon develops mental fatigue and

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[1]*Rough-Hewn*, p. 102.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. 87.
[3]*Ibid.*, p. 114.

languor. Neale came away from his last examination as stale and worthless as an overworked colt."[1] Neale never escaped the study habits formed at Hadley and he is no exception to the rule. Any boy like Neale, would cast aside a Rollins' Ancient History or any other school text as soon as he discovers its identity.[2]

Mrs. Fisher laments the fact that learning is a minor consideration among our college youths. In contrasting them with adults she says:

> They [adults] have in real life learned the value of study as lamentably our college students have not done.[3]

She speaks of college students' brains as "soft, assisted, and passive."[4] The picture which Sylvia Marshall had of the true student is a common one:

> The grinds, the qeer girls who wore their hair straight back from their foreheads, who invariably carried Phi Beta Kappa, whose skirts hung badly, whose shoe heels turned over as they walked, who stood first in their classes, whose belts made a practice of revealing large, white safety pins; and whose hats even dissociated from their dowdy wearers and hanging in the cloak room were of almost British eccentricity.[5]

With such a ghost as this in the scholarly girl's closet we cannot wonder that it does not appeal to the average girl. Sylvia found that these ghosts are largely traditional. She herself joined

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[1] Ibid., p. 119.

[2] Ibid., pp. 124, 125. "With a true Hadley horror for learning anything out of school hours he slammed it shut."

[3] Why Stop Learning?, p. 202.

[4] Ibid., p. 202.

[5] Ibid., p. 202

their ranks and found life as satisfying as the hub-bubbings of social life.

The college student's greatest problems are social. Mrs. Fisher is very frank in her criticism of the college social life. Being a mature woman she no doubt sees it in a different light from the girl in the midst of it. She condemns sororities and fraternities for their standards: money, servants, and fashionable parents. Their original purpose was to establish a homogeneous group but Mrs. Fisher criticizes them in that they only over-stimulate the social life of a few and add to the bitterness of the isolated ones. They only add

> . . . to the bewildering plethora of social life of those already having too much and adding sting to the solitude and ostracism of those who have none.[1]

Mrs. Fisher presents a great deal of her criticism of college life through Sylvia Marshall of The Bent Twig. Sylvia wonders why she is not elected to a sorority, being neither a freak nor a grind and knowing she is attractive both in person and dress. She did not realize that her countrified ways were responsible for her ostracism.[2] The author's chief denunciation of college social life is that it is undemocratic and artificial. It is stereotyped and narrows rather than promotes life. It tends to sophisticate youth. Neale Crittenden learned:

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[1]The Bent Twig, p. 149.

[2]Ibid., p. 147 ff.

> . . . to play poker, to drink more beer than he wanted; go keep a pipe going without burning his mouth; to learn where to go for chop suey; to sniff at a cigar and look wise before he bought it; to pretend to like coctails dry although as a matter of fact he did not like them at all; he learned to rattde off a line of bright, slangy, compliments at college dances and frat teas, and to take a flashier line with chippies at dance halls, he added to his store of smutty stories . . . the chapter thought well of him and he thought better of himself.[1]

Physical education is closely related to the social and intellectual education. It has been least affected by formal and traditional regulations. Youth has taken up the sponsorship of physical education and as long as they retain it there will be no question of physical eduoation succeeding.

Mrs. Fisher feels that athletic success for boys is equal to social success for girls. Without question success in physical contests lends social prestige:

> Neale found himself entitled to wear the "Varsity stripe" and monogram. This gave him a certain position in his class. *He was somebody.*[2]

Athletic training has an ethical value and strengthens character. It is a part of our education for life since athletics develop courage, self-mastery, self-reliance, good sportsmanship and coordinates muscular action with brain action. It was Neale Crittenden's custom:

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[1] *Rough-Hewn*, pp. 229-30.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

> . . . no matter to what outbreaks of emotion his exhausted body and overworked nerves might give way to in the dressing room, to walk out of it with his jaw set, his face impassive and never let an enemy rooter see a tear in his eye. It was by no means the education in the humanities and liberal arts which the University was supposed to provide him, but an education of its kind it certainly was.[1]

Mrs. Fisher's educational discussions prove that she feels our present educational system a bad one. They yearly unlock grim doors spewing forth youths to meet a life for which they are unprepared.[2] "If the pudding is at all proved by the eating",[3] we have failed to encourage growth among our youth; we have succeeded in stinting many personalities, over-indulging a few, creating an undemocratic society, and killed intellectual hunger and creative genius. Mrs. Fisher's own words:

> . . . if the pudding is at all proved by the eating our schools seem to knock on the head all intellectual curiosity so that commencement day is hailed with a whoop of joy as the date on which the process of learning can come to a dead and eternal halt. Our college graduates we begin to complain, use their diplomas as weapons with which to defend themselves against the assults of more education. They _have their education._[3]

4. Education of the Adult

Mrs. Fisher ventures into all fields of education, even that of the adult. This is a new and scarcely touched field. Mrs. Fisher finds in education the only means of human growth. She says:

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[1] _Rough-Hewn_, p. 227.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 94.

[3] _Why Stop Learning_, p. 9.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 9.

> I have always had in the back of my mind the problem of educating everybody.[1]

Adult education comes as a post-war activity. This field is the broadest and most difficult to comprehend; it includes social, political, ethical, economic, domestic, physical, aesthetic and all other phases of education needed in living. Mrs. Fisher adds a stimulus to every adult to keep growing in her book entitled Why Stop Learning?

She contends that mass education is necessary. However, the problems of obtaining it are momentous. It will require much time and great courage:

> We see opening before us a whole new conception of what education must be, daunting, discouraging, difficult. . . infinitely inspiring to courageous souls.[2]

The adult needs an education and desires it. The author considers him more worthy of an education than youth, because they realize the value of study and study with interest and purpose:

> . . . everybody knows that the only material which can be shaped by real education is a grown-up personality . . . all that can be done with youth is to get it started toward self-education with the right tools in its hands and the right habits in its head (and that is quite hard enough an undertaking!) We have been making as false pretenses as any thimble-rigger, in giving young people and their parents to understand that they can "get an education" in our schools. Schools, even the best schools, can only give them schooling. Education must be mixed and seasoned with life--experience, which is the one element no school can give and no young person can have.[3]

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[1] Ibid., Foreword, p. VII.
[2] Ibid., Foreword, p. IX.
[3] Ibid., p. 8.

Mrs. Fisher traces the history of adult education. In the past adults have learned almost entirely in the school of experience. Henry Ford says: "The greatest trouble with the school of experience is that the course is so long that the graduates are too old to go to work."[1] Mrs. Fisher points out that the shortened working day has awakened in adults a desire for further education. They have begun to realize that experience is not sufficient training for life:

> Routine and habit as equipment for the many may have been enough to run a non-industrialized society, organized along natural lines; but they are far from sufficient for our dangerously complicated, all too delicately adjusted modern organization.[2]

The amusement craze is related to this inward craving for something better. This craving results from an emptiness brought to realization through hours of leisure and a hope to find its satisfaction in mere amusement.

> Millions of human lives and human minds have a new blank emptiness which only a few in the race ever encountered before.[3]

The awareness of this hunger has been rapid in proportion to the rapid economic development. It has led to a challenge to our civilization and we are weighed in the balances and found wanting. The adult's desire for an education has been so sudden that we are unprepared to meet it.

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[1] Ibid., p. 37.
[2] Why Stop Learning?, p. 38.
[3] Ibid., p. 293.

Mrs. Fisher mentions various attempts (not nearly all) to meet this issue, and the problems aroused by these attempts. The first effort was the library movement which throughout its history until now has struggled to meet the need. At first the libraries were filled with philosophical and theological treatises which did not interest the majority of adults, since they were not suited to the average interest. Even after suitable books were added the librarian felt it her duty to protect the books rather than to get them into circulation. As the library movement grew it came to yield more and more to public opinion and as a result our libraries today are filled with light fiction--thus limiting the scope of readers and narrowing the public mind. We may excuse the librarians somewhat on the grounds that no very suitable books have been written. The kind we need, as explained by Mrs. Fisher, are those giving clear, simple discussions upon political, social, cultural, economic, domestic and vocational subjects. The few books of this kind which have been included in our libraries are too technical and uncomprehensible for the average adult. Slosson's investigations have revealed that not one such book on physics has been written.[1] Dr. Slosson has given us several rather simple discussions of certain fields of chemistry but even they are above the mind of the average person.

Another difficulty of the libraries of America is the fact that their books are not accessible to all of her people. Libraries have been universally established in England, and also in that new little country--Czecho-Slovakia. In America public libraries are only available

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 70.

to forty-four per cent of its population.[1] Moreover, the common family library does not make up for this deficiency. Home libraries on the average, are made up of a few Christmas-novels and the children's textbooks.

Another attempt to promote adult education was made by the woman's clubs. They met a legion of troubles because of opposition of the male sex; their ignorance of business methods; and a lack of funds. The women were inexperienced organizers and followed many blind alleys. The greatest problem with them was a desire for something but inability to analyze it. The members of the clubs were so eager to get in touch with the world's culture that they sacrificed originality, democracy, and even reasonableness in attaining it. They studied groups of stereotyped subjects for which they had no background. Mrs. Fisher points to progressive steps they have made and finds in them a hopeful promise for adult education. She hopes our women's clubs will be awakened to the need for creative democratic work.

Along with the libraries and women's clubs appeared the Lyceums and Chautauquas. These organizations reached many people who had no contacts with the outside world and who clutched at them eagerly as a step toward culture and something better. Mrs. Fisher with her figures at hand says:

> The Chautauquas and the Lyceums combined must reach easily one tenth of our adult population otherwise scarcely reached at all.[2]

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 70.
[2] Ibid., p. 162.

These organizations took advantage of people's confidence in them and lapsed into what Mrs. Fisher calls "an era of frightfulness". People still trusting, continued to patronize them. Mrs. Fisher finds therein a proof of her belief that adults desire an education. She says that the chautauqua's "era of frightfulness"

> . . . proved the existence of an unsuspected number of Americans who were willing to pay money for the chance to learn something.[1]

The greatest response to the call for adult education is the correspondence schools. If the Lyceums and Chautauquas proved the willingness of Americans to pay their money for a chance to learn something how much more loudly do the vast sums spent in correspondence work speak. Mrs. Fisher tells us that $70,000,000 are now spent thus annually. She also says that this sum is equal to fourteen state school budgets added together.[2] According to the figures given in Why Stop Learning? the enrollment in correspondance schools has reached the 2,000,000 mark, which is four times the number enrolled in colleges, universities, and professional schools.[3] Mrs. Fisher gives us a glimpse into the organization of some of these so-called correspondence schools. A man, his wife and hired man can run such a school even though the latter two cannot read or write. All that is necessary to establish such a school is to file with the county clerk of some state official your intentions of becoming a college and conferring degrees. Two thousand people are being duped in this way annually.

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 27.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

[3] Ibid., p. 32.

> When two million grown people in this country are looking for something they need, paying their money for a chance to find it, isn't it about time that some effort is made to protect them from sharpers and to give some aid and encouragement to the far-sighted, original minded educators in the new field who have sprung up to meet the new need honestly and efficiently?[1]

The only way this heartless duping can be checked is through the newspapers and magazines. If schools would prove their honesty by publishing themselves, people would know whom to trust; and magazines might take an interest in honest schools, keeping, all dishonest schools from advertising, and recommending that certain schools give value received.[1]

Mrs. Fisher considers that the University Extension Department represents the most worthy effort which has arisen to meet the demand for adult education. As a part of the university it is sustained by tax-payers and given free to those who ask. Although Mrs. Fisher seems to think our Universities all wrong, she seems to consider the Extension Department the good part of a bad system. It is superior to the University itself, in that it is more democratic and is offered to an older more serious group of people. This department has been established through a great cost in labor, brains and money. It was established to promote the cause of mass education. Any of its faults are no doubt due to immaturity. What it needs now is our advertising and support.

The very fact that adult education is voluntary makes it a problem because of (1) the adult's sensitiveness, and (2) the difficulty in inducing adults to "stick" to the work.

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 33.

Adults are very sensitive to criticism, especially of some enterprise which they are undertaking with which most young people are familiar. Criticism from young people tends to intimidate adults making them feel awkward, stupid and conspicuous. This self-consciousness makes it doubly hard for an adult to learn. Mrs. Fisher gives him a maxim to remember:

> No matter who he is, how expert or finished and elegant in another line, the learner of something new is always a sorry sight to the eye experienced and finished in that line.[1]

Getting an adult to undertake some study is difficult, but getting him to "stick to it" is greater. The adults' brain has grown sluggish from disuse. He has lost his habits of concentration and application. It is very easy for people to let making a living sap all of their vitality; and since education is not so imperative, it is put off, cast aside for the more pressing things. Procrastination, dread, neglect, death--this is the life history of many an adult's educational enterprise. Looking again at Mrs. Fisher's figures we find that two-thirds of the adults who take up educational work drop it.[2] Ninety per cent of those who enroll for correspondence courses drop them.[3] In the course given by the Banking Association, the mortality is less, but even here only sixty-eight per cent complete their work.[4]

Mrs. Fisher shows us with what success educational enterprises have met. The Banking Association's training developed a new morale among

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[1]*Why Stop Learning?*, p. 116.
[2]*Ibid.*, p. 193.
[3]*Ibid.*, p. 194.
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 194.

its workmen. All did better work whether they completed the course or not. One of the most successful efforts at adult education, according to Mrs. Fisher, is the attempt to educate the factory girls at Bryn Mawr. These girls responded in an amazing way. One of the Bryn Mawr professors says:

> After standing up for eight months before the somnolent daughters of the plutocracy it is like a breath of fresh air to come here and be challenged on economic theory by a garment worker.[1]

The greatest problem in cultural education of the masses is the opposition of the aristocracy. They contend that mass education will spoil the best instead of establishing a universal enjoyment of it. Mrs. Fisher points out that the aristocracy is proud of its culture and very reluctant to relinquish its monoply. The aristocrats contend that

> Appreciation of art is always confined to a minority--why try to force it upon the masses?[2]

Mrs. Fisher responds that culture need not be forced upon the masses, but it should be obtainable for those who desire it regardless of their social standing. The aristocracy of the cultured few has blinded them to the values of democracy.

> They do not see that the full appreciation of any of the finest things of life is always confined to a minority, that democracy does not deny that axiom, but is trying for the first time, to *find that minority,* and not limit it more than nature has done.[3]

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[1] *Why Stop Learning,* p. 208.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 256.

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 256.

Again she says:

> Only a minority of mankind will ever be as interested in self-education as in murders. All that can be hoped for is to find all the minority there is, and give it what it needs.[1]

Mrs. Fisher contrasts the spread of American culture with that of Denmark. She travelled in Denmark and has studied Danish education at first hand, so that she knows whereof she speaks when she says:

> Anybody who has ever seen a Danish farmhand knows that he does not seem any more promising material for cultural life than any other working man and yet Denmark has opened a door to him and he has walked through it. In our country no such door is open.[2]

We have only libraries for the bookish few. The Danes have

> . . . the golden, human incredible intention of teaching people how to get more civilized enjoyment out of everyday life, how to get acquainted . . . [with] the best which has been thought and said, [how to avoid] . . . the avidity of life in which music, and art and literature have no familiar daily place.[3]

One question, which is uppermost not only in the minds of the aristocracy but also in the minds of the educators is:

> Are the masses, ordinary folks, the general public worth serving? Are they material on which to form a lasting and desirable society or will they resist all that can be done for them by the most devoted care, and in the end drag down to a brute level or worse than mediocrity any society which tries to fit itself to them?[4]

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1 Why Stop Learning?, p. 256.

2 Ibid., p. 248.

3 Ibid., pp. 264 and 265.

4 Ibid., pp. 72 and 73.

Mrs. Fisher's conclusion is that we need not fear that mass education will go wrong. She feels that it is every individual's privilege and duty to use his talents, and if all enjoy good literature, good art, or any cultural thing they should all be permitted to indulge that taste and not be compelled to see them confined to a few selfish individuals. The right of a cultural education is every man's natural endowment. Mrs. Fisher sees no cause for worry about the passing of a cultural aristocracy. She says:

> I believe in an aristocracy of brains and taste superior to other humans in degree but not in kind.[1]

She believes in a nature determined aristocracy rather than one determined by money, inheritance or social prestige.

Mrs. Fisher favors democratic mass education. The adult is "the material that will repay the greater outlay of money and intelligence to give it what it needs in the way of teaching." [2] She says further that

> The dull-minded, the slow minded, those whom it would be a waste to try to educate further, settle down here to stay like dry leaves blown in a hollow. But this is the point when in the case of the energetic and purposeful begins a voluntary search for more training.[3]

Mass education is essential for domestic, national, and even international happiness. Mrs. Fisher quotes from M. Balliol:

> Adult education is a permanent national necessity, an unseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and life-long.[4]

[1] _Why Stop Learning?_, p. 149.

[2] _Ibid._, p. 202.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 262.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 275.

Therefore

> We must go on learning, or perish; and in perishing bring down the whole complicated structure about our ears.[1]

This is Mrs. Fisher's challenge: "Why Stop Learning?" Why be a stupid "back-number" and let every bird of passage dupe us into paying our good money for nothing? Why go to sleep because we are out of school? It is far more essential that we be awake in life than at school because the problems are far more numerous and complicated. Schooling is only schooling; we are not truly educated until it is seasoned with life. Mrs. Fisher says it is time to awaken from our adult sluggishness. Living must be whole heartedly from birth onward until death. No adult can afford to go to sleep. In mature life we meet most of our problems and need to grow; and people are beginning to feel this.

> All over the country people . . . are learning that children do not enjoy expensive toys as much as the opportunity for free creative effort. I wonder when it will occur to them that the same thing is true of everybody; and that shiny too costly automobiles and shaggy fur coats and perhaps even sacred open plumbing are futile and expensive toys which cannot consolte grown-ups for the lack of more important elements in life.[2]

These more important elements in life come through education.

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[1] Why Stop Learning?, p. 275.
[2] Ibid., pp. 141 & 142.

Chapter VI

Mrs. Fisher's Gospel of the Well-Rounded Life

Mrs. Fisher's isolation from the city and her close contact with simple, rustic folk have warmed and kept alive a fresh, responsive interest in people. She is kind and sympathetic to all, especially children. The Dial, for October, 1927, speaks of the warmth and penetration, the vitality and charm, with which she treats them. She comprehends the instability of the child's mind. Mrs. Fisher is always interested in "just folks", regardless of color or nationality. Her international education has made her kindly and tolerant of all peoples. She has an imtimate knowledge of the lives, breadth, interests and philosophies of many peoples.

Being born the daughter of an educator and without doubt influenced by her father, Mrs. Fisher has become a true educator. She believes in education with all her heart, the education of everybody. Mrs. Fisher's spirit is the spirit of progress and growth. Her doctrine is a doctrine of growth and efficiency--efficiency in utilizing man's talents to the best of his ability. She opposes those things opposed to growth--culturally, mentally, socially, physically, or spiritually. She upholds growth in that it means greater happiness and a higher plane of living--and to Mrs. Fisher, full wholehearted living is the greatest aim of mankind. Mrs. Fisher desires to make that living the richest possible.

Her plan of betterment is to attack the problems opposing social progress: the problems of parents, their relations to one another, to their children, to their home, and to the community at large. She is interested in keeping the home together and making its passage safe. In her novels the story is often hurried in some problem; and at times she uses odd measures to bring about the desired end, but she is capable of much contriving:

> Just as one of Smollett's heroes, Penegrine Pickle, says, penegrinates through one thousand pickles, so Miss Canfield (Mrs. Fisher) can convey Sylvia through a perfect Odyssey of possibilities--only whereas Smollett has merely to allow his imagination to play about the recollection of the violent practical jokes delightful to the eighteenth century. Miss Canfield has to conceive the possible blind alleys in an easy, luxuriant life today.[1]

The same thing might be truly said of any number of Mrs. Fisher's characters other than Sylvia, or Mary Bascome, for instance. Mrs. Fisher deals with practical issues. She probes into economic difficulties, educational problems and the disturbances of the home. Her purpose is to awaken us to the great problems of the day and point out the conclusion which she feels is right and reasonable. She encourages hard, healthy, honest growth. She desires physical, intellectual and cultural progress for everyone.

Mrs. Fisher is a true patriot, a real preacher of democracy. She herself is democratic to the core. She advocates a reasonable democracy in education, in the home, and in our relations with one another. She revolts at the tyranny of our schools over the plastic minds of the

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[1]Edward E. Hale, Dial, LIX, (Dec. 23, 1915), p. 616.

child; the social tyranny of the moneyed students over the poor; and the duping of the ignorant by the clever. Mrs. Fisher has investigated, studied, thought and preached democracy; by which, however, she does not mean illegitimate liberty. She would abolish our haughty aristocracy allowing nature to determine the superior ones. She desires the right of universal enjoyment of cultural things. Above all, she advocates letting man determine his own position in life without traditional or outside interference. She upholds the rights of the individual.

Mrs. Fisher has been disciple, revolter, reformer, and prophet in turn. She shows a shrewd grasp of social problems and the principles underlying them. She has pitted her intellect against the problems of human society. She has dug, pushed, and beckoned us on toward a goal of the greatest satisfaction in living.

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