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A COMPLETE PERSON



DEAR FRIENDS:



In those days gone by when well cultured young ladies were in training to become clinging vines, Grandmother was a complete person. She was a woman for all seasons and all situations. She was emancipated from the cradle to the grave. Wellesley equipped her for life, and she was always a credit to her alma mater. Grandmother believed in education, and that it was a moral duty to make full use of the faculties with which she had been endowed. She considered it beneath her dignity to compete with men or become involved in finances or politics. To her material ambitions were in the domain of men who had nothing better to think about.

So far as I can remember, Grandmother was never frustrated or neurotic. She was too busy fulfilling her own destiny to be concerned with trivia. One of her earliest dedications was to music. She never thought of herself as a professional, but played the piano pleasantly and graciously. She had a slight but pleasant voice and liked to sing old Scotch and English folk ballads. If necessity arose, she knew a number of familiar hymns; and in her younger days was an understudy for the church organist. She was quite a musicologist and could hold her own in a conversation on harmonic theory. She always declared, however, that you never really understood any art unless you practiced it yourself. Appreciation is good, but participation is indispensable.

Grandmother then turned her attention to painting and always worked in oils. She became an excellent colorist, but never felt herself qualified to paint from the life. She followed a popular procedure and made quite creditable copies of the works of recognized masters. She found a kindred spirit in Rosa Bonheur--a gifted French lady who specialized in panoramic paintings of animals, especially horses. Grandmother selected details from such pictures as "The Horse Fair" and they were proudly displayed in her family home. She also talked learnedly about palettes, complementary colors, and palette-knife technique. After it became obvious

that she had conquered this medium, Grandmother became deeply involved in the raising of three daughters. She had an old Singer sewing machine with a foot pedal and made all her children's clothes, designing each garment with fastidious care. Always thrifty like her Scotch ancestry, she made a fine art of darning and mending. Good stockings were never thrown away because they had a few holes or runs. She had what she called a "darner"--a ball-like contrivance with a short handle which enabled her to make virtually invisible mends.

By the time the three daughters went to school, Grandmother was ready to coach them on every possible subject from mathematics to Latin. She invited teachers to afternoon tea to clarify fine points of the curriculum. She wanted to make sure that her daughters' schooling was imparted with appropriate gentility.

From darning and mending it was only a step to embroidery. When she decided to make a gift to someone, it had to be one of her own creations. To buy a present violated the Wellesley tradition. She had wonderful skill in needlework with a fondness for floral patterns. She put rose buds on the tea cozy, and full blooms on the antimacassars. She put scalloped edges on napkins, eyelets on pillow covers, and lace inserts on tablecloths. She also liked to add embroidery to children's dresses. When Grandmother made her grand tour of Europe, she visited most of the important craft centers. In some cases she simply memorized techniques, but she actually took lessons in the making of venetian point lace. She became very proficient in this beautiful and complicated art and liked to make collars for her dresses. In Italy she paused long enough to experiment with wood-burning technique and the creating of embossed patterns on thin sheets of brass.

In Belgium she caught up with tapestry. She learned the technique but was never able to practice this art. She was satisfied, therefore, to buy several examples of nineteenth century Belgian tapestry. There was nothing rare about them, but she treasured them to the end of her life. It was not the pictures on the tapestries that especially pleased her, it was the simple fact that she knew how the work was done and appreciated the skill and patience of the workers in the tapestry factories.

Back in the United States, Grandmother continued with her embroidery. While living in South Dakota, she found a design of an American Indian chieftain in full regalia. She overlaid the design with several types of embroidery and invented stitches suitable to represent coarse fur and tanned animal hides. I still have the example of Grandmother's Indian embroidery, and a small section of it is reproduced in this letter. My mother was an apt pupil and was also most expert in needlecraft. Inspired by the work of an old Scottish lady, Grandmother then turned her attention to knitting and crocheting. By this time she had two small granddaughters whom she supplied with jackets, dresses, hats, and bootees. So far as I remember, Grandmother's only failure was her effort to teach me embroidery. It was when I was about eight years old, and I sincerely did my best to please her but never did get the knack of it. She finally gave up with genteel despair.

Looking back on life with Grandmother, I feel that she deserved the title of being a complete person. She was equal to every occasion that arose and sincerely believed that it was woman's privilege to unfold the powers of her own inner life. She was never hampered by convention because her dedications were uniquely her own. She admitted that men and women should cooperate for the common good. She taught her daughters to keep faith with the wonderful world of ladies "to the manor born."

Today we think of the Victorian Era as a time in which male chauvinism was dominant and women were second-class citizens. If this was true, Grandmother never found out about it. She never campaigned for women's rights because she always did what she pleased. She believed firmly that if she was ladylike, she would always be treated like a lady, and this is precisely what happened. Grandmother was fifty years old when I came into her life. She had no personal experience with raising a boy, but nothing daunted, she was resolved to make me a gentleman if possible. She believed that a complete man must also have an appreciation for art, music, literature, and integrity. He must develop his own potentials and build a career appropriate to his abilities. A gentleman keeps himself disciplined, always courteous and thoughtful. He should provide for his parents, win the confidence of his children, and recognize a lady when he saw one. He should never be so busy that he had no time for the courtesies, and never so successful in his career that he became a failure in his private life.

Most sincerely yours,

*Marilyn P. Hall*

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