



**FIGHTING FOR LIFE**  
S. JOSEPHINE BAKER

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INTRODUCTION BY  
**HELEN EPSTEIN**

SARA JOSEPHINE BAKER (1873–1945) was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, and attended the Woman's Medical College of the New York Infirmary. As the first director of New York's Bureau of Child Hygiene from 1908 to 1923, Baker's work with poor mothers and children in the immigrant communities of New York City dramatically reduced maternal and child mortality and became a model for cities across the country. On two occasions she helped to track down Mary Mallon, the cook who came to be known as Typhoid Mary. Baker wrote fifty journal articles and more than two hundred pieces for the popular press about preventive medicine, as well as six books: *Healthy Babies, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Children* (all 1920), *The Growing Child* (1923), *Child Hygiene* (1925), and her autobiography, *Fighting for Life* (1939). In the 1930s Baker, along with her partner of many years, the novelist Ida Wylie, and their friend Dr. Louise Pearce, moved to a two-hundred-year-old farm in New Jersey, where she lived until her death.

HELEN EPSTEIN is a writer specializing in public health and an adjunct professor at Bard College. She has advised numerous organizations, including the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, Human Rights Watch, and UNICEF. She is the author of *The Invisible Cure: Why We Are Losing the Fight Against AIDS in Africa* and has contributed articles to many publications, including *The New York Review of Books* and *The New York Times Magazine*.

# FIGHTING FOR LIFE

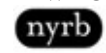
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# CONTENTS

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[Biographical Notes](#)

[Title page](#)

[Copyright and More Information](#)

[Introduction](#)

[FIGHTING FOR LIFE](#)

[Dedication](#)

[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#)

[Photographs](#)

# INTRODUCTION

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The Lower East Side of New York was one of the most densely populated square miles on the face of the earth in the 1890s. The photo-essayist Jacob Riis famously described it as a world of bad smells, scuffling rats, ash barrels, dead goats, and little boys drinking beer out of milk cartons. Six thousand people might be packed into a single city block, many in tenements with sanitary facilities so foul that they had to repel anyone who dared approach. City health inspectors called the neighborhood “the suicide ward”; one tenement was referred to—in an official New York City Health Department report, no less—as an “out and out hog pen.”[\[1\]](#)

Diarrhea epidemics blazed through the slums each summer, killing thousands of children every week. In the sweatshops of what was then known as “Jewtown,” children with smallpox and typhoid dozed in heaps of garments destined for fashionable Broadway shops. Desperate mothers paced the streets trying to soothe their feverish children, and white mourning cloths hung from every story of every building. A third of the children born in the slums died before their fifth birthday.

In the European farming villages where many of these immigrants came from, people spent most of their time outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine and seldom encountered more than a few hundred people in the course of lifetime. “Crowd diseases”—measles, dysentery, typhoid, diphtheria, trachoma, and so on—were rare, and the immigrants had little idea of how to prevent them. Some parents vainly tried to administer folk remedies; others just prepared the little funeral shrouds in silence.

It was in the 1890s that Sara Josephine Baker decided to become a doctor. Not the Josephine Baker who would become celebrated as a cabaret star and dance at the Folies Bergère in a banana miniskirt, but the New York City public health official in a shirtwaist and four-in-hand necktie, her short hair parted in the middle like Theodore Roosevelt, whom she admired. By the time Baker retired from the New York City Health Department in 1923, she was famous across the nation for saving the lives of ninety thousand inner-city children. The public health measures she implemented, many still in use today, have saved the lives of millions more world-wide. She was also a charming, funny storyteller, and her remarkable memoir, *Fighting for Life*, is an honest, unsentimental, and deeply compassionate account of how one American woman helped launch a public health revolution.

Baker grew up in a modestly prosperous Poughkeepsie family and studied medicine at the Women's Medical College in Manhattan, which was run by Emily Blackwell, the sister of the more famous Elizabeth, America's first woman doctor. Baker graduated second in her class. The only course she failed was The Normal Child, taught by Dr. Annie Sturges Daniel, a pioneer health educator who also campaigned for better housing conditions for the poor. Baker had to retake the class and in studying for it became fascinated with “that little pest, the normal child” whom she would go on to make the focus of her career.

After graduation, Baker took an internship at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston and then returned to establish a private practice in New York. She once examined the actress Lillian Russell, but most of her patients resided in the tin squatters' shacks of Amsterdam Avenue and couldn't pay her. In need of money, she applied for a job with the Department of Health and was hired in 1902.

Medicine in those days required a certain daring. While still in Boston, she almost killed a drunk who was beating his pregnant wife as Baker was trying to deliver their baby. As a New York City health inspector, she administered smallpox injections to snoozing hoboes in Bowery flophouses and fielded calls from Tammany politicians requesting that she hire their cast-off mistresses as nurses.

(she declined), and chased down the notorious cook Typhoid Mary through the streets of Manhattan. Baker had to sit on Mary all the way to the hospital to keep her in the ambulance.

Modern readers might be put off by Baker's tendency—common in those days—to generalize about the various ethnic groups she encountered in the city's variegated slums. Blacks come off well; the Irish all seem to have been slapstick drunks. However, she clearly understood that their misery and dissolution were part of a wider culture of official corruption and indifference to the poor, which afflicted even her own Health Department.

In the tenements of Hell's Kitchen, Baker "climbed stair after stair, knocked on door after door, met drunk after drunk, filthy mother after filthy mother and dying baby after dying baby." Most of her fellow health inspectors didn't bother to make rounds at all; they just forged their records and went on their way. Baker, who might well have been fired for making everyone else look bad, was lucky to have the support of the Tammany-affiliated but nevertheless reform-inclined mayor George McClellan, elected in 1903. He appointed a new health commissioner who dismissed the other inspectors and promoted Baker. In 1908, she was put in charge of the Health Department's new Bureau of Child Hygiene, the first of its kind in the country.

There she changed the way we think about public health. Until then, the Health Department had sought to track down sick children and refer them to physicians, a mostly futile endeavor in the absence of antibiotics and other tools of modern medicine. Baker decided that the new bureau's mission would instead be prevention. The city had an established and efficient system of birth registration. As soon as a child was born, her name and address were reported to the Health Department. Baker reasoned that if every new mother were properly taught how to feed and care for her baby and recognize the signs of illness, the mother would have a much better chance of keeping the child alive.

In her first year at the Bureau of Child Hygiene, Baker sent nurses to the most deadly ward on the Lower East Side. They were to visit every new mother within a day of delivery, encouraging exclusive breast-feeding, fresh air, and regular bathing, and discouraging hazardous practices such as feeding the baby beer or allowing him to play in the gutter. This advice was entirely conventional, but the results were extraordinary: That summer, 1,200 fewer children died in that district compared to the previous year; elsewhere in the city the death rate remained high. The home-visiting program was soon implemented citywide, and in 1910, a network of "milk stations" staffed by nurses and doctors began offering regular baby examinations and safe formula for older infants and the infants of women who couldn't breast-feed. In just three years, the infant death rate in New York City fell by 40 percent, and in December 1911, *The New York Times* hailed the city as the healthiest in the world.

Articles about Baker's lifesaving campaigns appeared in newspapers from Oklahoma to Michigan to California. In the late 1910s, she and other reformers drafted a bill to create a nationwide network of home-visiting programs and maternal and child health clinics modeled on the programs in New York. But the American Medical Association—backed by powerful Republicans averse to spending money on the poor—claimed the program was tantamount to Bolshevism. Baker was in Washington the day a young New England doctor explained the AMA's position to a congressional committee:

"We oppose this Bill because, if you are going to save the lives of all these women and children at public expense, what inducement will there be for young men to study medicine?" Senator Sheppard, the chairman, stiffened and leaned forward: "Perhaps I didn't understand you correctly," he said; "You surely don't mean you want women and children to die unnecessarily or live in constant danger of sickness so there will be something for young doctors to do?" "Why not?" said the New England doctor, who did at least have the courage to admit the issue; "That's the will of God, isn't it?"

Baker's public health innovations were numerous. In addition to the home-visiting programs and community baby clinics, she established the position of the school nurse, developed special capsules for delivering silver nitrate to the eyes of newborns to prevent blindness due to congenital gonorrhea, invented a window board for improving ventilation in houses, and created a more efficient method of medical record keeping. She even designed a set of baby clothes that was more convenient and comfortable than the swaddling traditionally used in the immigrant ghettos.

The massive declines in child mortality that Baker helped bring about are frequently attributed to improved nutrition and a general improvement in working and living conditions, and to the availability of vaccines and antibiotics. However, demographers who have studied this subject in detail have concluded that it had little to do with any of these things. Most vaccines and antibiotics weren't available until after World War II and the "general uplift" in nutrition and living conditions occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, decades before the mortality decline. This may have set the stage for the drop in the death rate that followed, but the survival of babies didn't substantially improve until safer milk supplies became widely available and, even more crucially, campaigns like Baker's had helped women understand germs and how to avoid them, so they could provide better care for their children.<sup>[2]</sup>

But safe milk and hygiene aren't the only things children need to survive. Baker was the first to prove scientifically that they also need love. In an era when reliable birth control was unavailable and abortion was unsafe and illegal, hundreds of newborns were abandoned each year in New York City. Babies turned up in parks and alleyways or on the doorsteps of fashionable houses. These foundlings were assumed to be illegitimate and until 1870 weren't even welcome at Catholic charity orphanages. Most ended up in squalid municipal almshouses with the paupers, drunks, and insane; nearly all of them died. But in 1915, a foundling hospital opened on Randall's Island under the direction of Baker's Bureau of Child Hygiene. There trained nurses provided the babies with state-of-the-art care and feeding. Nonetheless, close to half of them still died. In what Baker's nurses referred to as the "hopeless ward," where the most premature, sickly babies lay in tiny boxes lined with cotton wool, virtually none survived.

At the time, many doctors would have been unconcerned about this. While the deaths of old infants and children might be attributed to inadequate hygiene and nutrition and prevented accordingly, eugenically minded child health experts believed that the deaths of newborns, defined as children aged under a month or so, were due to their inborn "sub-normality"; there was nothing doctors could do for them. For the benefit of racial hygiene, it was probably better not to care for them. After all, they'd only grow up and pass their sickly genes on to the next generation.

But Baker didn't agree that the fate of these infants was inevitable. She had noticed that though infant mortality had plummeted in the slums due to the bureau's efforts, it hadn't budged in wealthy neighborhoods. "Sometimes," she writes, "it really looked as if a baby born in a dingy tenement room had a better chance to survive its first year, given reasonable care, than a baby born with a silver spoon in its mouth and taken care of by a trained nurse who knew all the latest hygienic answers." Intrigued, she decided to experiment. She boarded out the sickliest newborns in the hopeless ward to a corps of gushing Italian mothers on the Lower East Side who had been trained in proper child care by the bureau's visiting nurses. "Off-hand it sounds like murder," Baker confesses. "Moving these poor little potential ghosts out of this ward where everything was light and sterile and spick and span, into tenement rooms on Hester and Orchard streets."

Once again the results were astonishing: The death rate of these vulnerable babies was cut in half. Baker had hit upon a truth that we now take for granted. At the time, medical opinion held that mothers should train their babies early to be independent by feeding them at regular intervals and ignoring their cries and babbles. Doing otherwise was thought to damage them psychologically and



create neuroses. We now know the opposite is true. Emotionally sensitive and responsive human contact is essential for normal child development. Without such care, children may be physically stunted, mentally retarded, or even die.<sup>[3]</sup> Baker had no children of her own, but she saw clearly that though a baby “may still be unable to talk, walk or do anything but feed and cry and kick . . . he nevertheless needs that sense of being at home in a new world. . . . Even more than he needs butter and fresh air and clean diapers . . . he needs the personal equation to give him a reason for living.”

That Baker’s decisive work is so little known today is probably due to its great success: Much of what she taught us now seems self-evident. However, the neglect of her contributions may also be political. During the 1950s and ’60s, America once again faced the challenge of integrating millions of disenfranchised citizens into its systems of public education, health, and social welfare, but this time those citizens were impoverished blacks, most of whom had been left behind by the public health revolution of the early twentieth century. They occupied, in demographer Samuel Preston’s words, “a separate caste” in U.S. society. Their living conditions were much worse than those of whites, they had poorer access to whatever medical care was available, and black women with infants were much more likely to work outside the home—and for much longer hours and in much worse conditions than white women. This would have made it difficult for them to take advantage of the new health care, education and provide the kind of care their children needed.

Civil rights legislation and new programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Head Start helped many people, both black and white, but they could not shield children from the steadily worsening poverty of the 1970s and ’80s. In 1971, a group of Washington officials and their allies in the civil rights movement drafted the Comprehensive Child Care and Development Act, which would have created a nationwide system of high-quality day-care, preschool, and home-visiting programs that resembled the national system of child health programs envisioned by Baker and other reformers fifty years earlier. Most Americans supported the bill and it passed both houses of Congress with strong bipartisan support, but right-wing Republicans, using language similar to that used to quash the mother and baby care programs, pressured President Nixon to veto it.<sup>[4]</sup>

His adviser Pat Buchanan encouraged conservative journalists to write commentaries with headlines such as “Child Development Act—To Sovietize Our Youth,” which Buchanan would then present to Nixon in his morning press digest, as if it represented mainstream conservative opinion.<sup>[5]</sup> Even though polls suggested most Americans supported the bill, large numbers of letters denouncing it—some even comparing it to the Hitler Youth programs—poured in to the White House. Edward Zigler, head of Nixon’s Office of Child Development and one of the main architects of the bill, read through many of them. Most seemed to him to be form letters, and he suspected the campaign had been orchestrated by a small number of conservative opponents. Nevertheless, the president got the message, vetoed the bill, and the “Family Values” movement—devoted to challenging all federal programs for the poor—was born. Today, nearly every other industrialized nation on earth provides some form of guaranteed support to families with young children. That America still does not is considered by many to be a national disgrace.

After the veto, some experts continued to pursue the vision of comprehensive child care services. During the 1970s, David Olds, now a professor of pediatric psychiatry at the University of Colorado, was working in a Baltimore day-care center for preschoolers. Many of the children came from homes wracked by poverty, drug abuse, domestic violence, and other problems. Realizing that there was only so much the center could do to help them, he eventually went on to create the Nurse Family Partnership, a home-visiting program in which trained nurses taught poor mothers how to provide a safe, secure, stimulating environment for their children, and helped them envision a better future for themselves. Twenty years later, Olds found that the children of mothers who received the visits were

not only healthier but were also less likely to have been abused or neglected and more likely to finish school, get jobs, and stay out of jail than a similar group of children whose mothers had not received the visits. Economists now estimate that every dollar invested in high quality home-visiting, day-care, and preschool programs results in \$7 in savings on welfare payments, health-care costs, substance abuse treatment, and incarceration, plus higher tax revenues due to better-paying jobs.<sup>[6]</sup>

In the early 1930s, Baker toured Soviet Russia. Unlike the United States even now, the Soviets already had a comprehensive system of day-care centers and preschools. Maternal and child health care was free and pregnant women were given paid leave from their jobs. Baker was well aware of the purges, labor camps, deliberate mass starvation, and other horrors of the Soviet system, but the nation's dedication to the care of the young impressed her. Still, as she toured these programs, she noticed something odd. None of the children ever seemed to fight or cry, and she never saw children laughing except on propaganda posters. "They just sat and looked at you like so many little Buddhas," she writes. Play activities were rigidly organized and even potty behavior seemed to be governed by Soviet methods of synchronized regulation.

Since its inception, the Soviet Union had been preparing for another world war, and Baker suspected there was a connection between this and the child-development programs. "You could not talk to an Intourist guide for ten minutes without hearing something about the Red Army and the impending war," she wrote, "and, from sickening experience, I knew it was no accident that, in 1934, the two groups of Russians who looked really well fed were the soldiers and the children."

In some respects, contemporary America is not all that different. It turns out there is one group of Americans that receives high-quality government-subsidized child-care services, including day care, preschool, home-visiting programs, and health care: the U.S. military. Unlike the Soviet version, these comprehensive programs aren't designed to create obedient little soldiers. Instead, they use a play-oriented approach to help bring out children's individual cognitive and social capabilities. This may help explain why military children score higher on reading and mathematics tests than public school children, and why the black/white achievement gap is much lower in military families than it is in the general population.<sup>[7]</sup> Since the military child-care program was created in 1989, the government has repeatedly declined requests to fund an in-depth evaluation, perhaps because if the effects were known, all Americans would demand these programs for their children too.

Baker appears to have destroyed all her personal papers, so little is known about her life except what is in this memoir. After retiring from the Bureau of Child Hygiene, she lived in Princeton, New Jersey, with the novelist and Hollywood scriptwriter I.A.R. (Ida) Wylie, who was the author of more than a dozen romantic melodramas, including *Torch Song* with Joan Crawford and *Keeper of the Flame* with Spencer Tracy. The witty, detached, sometimes hilarious but always morally decent tone of *Fighting for Life* resembles Wylie's own memoir, *My Life with George*. Although the books tell totally different stories, some phrases, including "fighting for life," appear in both, and it's likely that Wylie ministered to Baker's prose. Their roommate was Louise Pearce, a Rockefeller University scientist who helped invent the cure for sleeping sickness and then traveled alone to the Belgian Congo in 1922 to test it. Around Princeton they were referred to as "the girls," but otherwise, gossip appears to have been restrained. They must have been wonderful to know. Read the first page of *Fighting for Life*, and you'll see.

—HELEN EPSTEIN

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*To*

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DR. ANNIE STURGES DANIEL ~~who started me on my way~~

*and*

DR. JACOB SOBEL

whose whole-hearted cooperation  
made the goal attainable

# CHAPTER I

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MY IMPULSE TO TRY TO DO THINGS ABOUT hopeless situations appears to have cropped out first when I was about six years old, and it should be pointed out that the method I used was characteristically direct. I was all dressed up for some great occasion—a beautiful white lacy dress with a blue sash and light blue silk stockings and light blue kid shoes—and inordinately vain about it. While waiting for my Mother to come down, I wandered out in front of the house to sit on the horse block and admire myself and hope that someone would come along and see me in all my glory.

Presently a spectator did arrive—a little colored girl about my size but thin and peaked and hungry-looking, wearing only a ragged old dress the color of ashes. I have never seen such dumb envy in any human being's face before or since. Child that I was, I could not stand it; it struck me right over the heart. I could not bear the idea that I had so much and she had so little. So I got down off the horse block and took off every stitch I had on, right down to the blue shoes that were the joy of my infantile heart and gave everything, underwear and all, to the little black girl. I watched her as she scampered away, absolutely choked with bliss. Then I walked back into the house, completely naked, wondering why I had done it and how to explain my inexplicable conduct. Oddly enough both Father and Mother seemed to understand pretty well what had gone on in my mind. They were fine people, my father and mother.

I know that women of my generation who struck out on their own are supposed to have become rebellious because they felt cramped and suppressed and unhappy as children in an alien environment. It is a convenient formula and no doubt perfectly applicable in many cases. But it does not fit mine. I was reared in a thoroughly conventional tradition and took to it happily. I understood that after I left school I would go to Vassar, and then, I supposed, I would get married and raise a family and that would be that. Until events of the sort that are notoriously beyond one's control forced me to take a bewildered thought for the morrow, I had no more purpose in life than a million other American girls being brought up just as I was in the eighties and nineties.

It would have taken a pretty demanding, not to say peevish, kind of child to fail to adjust to the family environment in which I was reared. We were reasonably well to do as wealth went in Poughkeepsie, so I had none of that precocious sense of responsibility which children often derive from straitened family incomes. Father was one of the most eminent lawyers in town; so eminent that when I was making a speech in Poughkeepsie several years ago, I received a large basket of flowers with a card: "From the members of the Dutchess County Bar to the daughter of O. D. M. Baker." That was about thirty years after his death and it went straight to the heart of a daughter one of whose earliest resolves was to make it up to Father for having been born a girl. There is no particular point in emphasizing that ambition or its cause. Father was not one of those childish people who take disappointment out on children. But I did happen to arrive in the world as the third daughter in a row and I heard family legends about Father's remarks when the nurse congratulated him on Daughter Number Three. Father always knew his own mind. He had known his own mind ever since he was a boy, when he ran away from a stepmother he disliked and educated himself into becoming a proverbially brilliant lawyer. The education was his first brilliant piece of work. He was one of those rare examples of self-educated people who really are educated.

He did things thoroughly. His professional education was sound and adequate. When he bought shoes, made to order in New York City, he ordered them seven pairs at a time, all exactly alike, and wore each pair only one day a week which, of course, was the best possible way to get maximum mileage out of each pair. When he went in for amateur carpentry for relaxation from the strain of

business, he filled the attic with five times as many elaborate tools as the ordinary cabinetmaker uses and became a first-class craftsman. He had been devoted to fishing all of his life. When he died, his fishing equipment included thirty-nine split bamboo rods, not to mention all kinds of odd tackle, and nearly thirteen thousand artificial flies all arranged around in cases in his library. By the time I could stand alone I was being taught to cast a line and every summer we spent a month or two at the Balsam Lake Club in the Catskill Mountains where we all fished in the Beaverkill Creek or in the quiet mountain lake which was part of the club's property. There were odd times of fishing in the Dutchess County lakes and streams and I can still drop a fly in an eddy with a subtlety that bodes ill for trout in the vicinity.

A sober, quiet man who never uttered an unnecessary word. His mother, who died when he was quite young, must have had romantic ambitions for him, because she named him: Orlando Daniel Mosher Baker. When he ran away from home, he came to Poughkeepsie from his nearby birthplace in Hyde Park, and was presently studying law in the office of the Honorable Homer A. Nelson. One day Mr. Nelson asked his young clerk to dinner to meet a young Vassar girl named Jenny Brown whose father, worried by the idea of having a daughter away from home at a new-fangled college, had asked his friend, Mr. Nelson, to look out for her. The bright young clerk and the pretty college girl liked each other on sight and the inevitable happened.

There were some fine and strange names in my family background, on my mother's side. My grandmother Brown was born in Boston. She was Arvilla Danforth, a direct descendant of the Samuel Danforth who was one of the committee to vote the money which made possible the founding of Harvard College. There was a curious trend in that branch of the Danforth family for they named their four daughters Arvilla, Permilla, Lucilla and Marilla. I knew only my grandmother, a fine woman of the old school, and my great-aunt Marilla who married Dr. Bleeker L. Hovey of Rochester, New York and went with him as a nurse throughout the war between the states. As plain Jenny Brown, my mother inherited nothing of this richness of nomenclature; but she had a touch of the pioneer in her, a natural result of the same spirit which led her father, Merritt H. Brown who was born in Bennington, Vermont, to take his bride from Boston and trek out to the little settlement in Dansville, New York. There he and his wife brought up their family of seven children. My mother, who was the next to the youngest child, started out in the same spirit when she went to Poughkeepsie and, on the first day of the opening of Vassar College, enrolled herself as a student there. By pure chance, or perhaps by alphabetical arrangement, she appears on the record as the first, or one of the first, students to enter Matthew Vassar's new college for women. Fifty years after her enrollment, she was a guest of honor at the College's celebration of its half-century of progress and saw herself, in the college play *Milestones*, as "Jenny Brown" portrayed in old-fashioned costume entering the college and talking to Matthew Vassar.

Our Poughkeepsie house was a fine sample of a kind of architecture which has left an ineffaceable mark on Hudson River towns: three stories, gray slate mansard roof, veranda across the front, patch of front lawn and a stretch of back lawn running through to the next street, decorated with trees and children's play house. All it lacked to be perfect was a set of lightning rods. Evidently Father was one of the few citizens of Poughkeepsie sufficiently strong minded to resist the blandishments of the ever present lightning-rod salesman. My father and mother went to live in this house when they were first married and we four children were all born there. My oldest sister, Arvilla, died in infancy; my next older sister, Mary, lived until about twelve years ago; my brother, Robert Nelson Millerd Baker, died when he was thirteen; and now I am the only one left of that vigorous and very happy family.

There was plenty of room in our house and we made the most of it. Only on rare occasions were we without guests. It seemed to me that there were always people coming or going or staying. Innumerable friends made it a stopping place. There were my numerous cousins from Amherst

College who always came for the holidays and many of the students from the thriving Riverside Military School in town which had a great reputation as an educational institution in those days and drew boys from all over the United States. There were *always* relays of Vassar students who would come for the week ends and bring with them any girls who they thought looked homesick. Dr. Kendrick, who was then the President of Vassar, used to call it "The Vassar Annex," but it was more than that. I belonged to a hospitable family.

There was little to Vassar College at that time but the old main building, a gymnasium and the astronomical observatory which naturally followed from the fact that Maria Mitchell, the great woman astronomer, was a member of the faculty. It was strict, too, much stricter than the present-day girls' boarding school. The girls were not allowed even to come into Poughkeepsie without a teacher as an escort, though that seemed to be waived when they came to see us. We knew all about it and were as much at home with the personnel of the institution as if they had been our cousins. Commencement time, Founders Day, and "Phil" would mean as much company and jollification as Christmas and always rated with circus day in my juvenile calendar.

It took something big to be a great occasion too, for people lived gaily in that era. I do not know what charts of the business cycle have to say about it, but as I look back, it seems to me to have been an ample, affluent time. I think the gay nineties deserved their name; certainly the earlier part of the decade was a joyous time and even before that we were gay enough; even the children were.

There was always something going on, some simple, cheerful, comradely occasion among people who all knew and liked each other. We took full advantage of being on the Hudson River and one of my major accolades of that time was when the Poughkeepsie paper said that I pulled "one of the best oars among the girls in town." There were the clam bakes which were held a few miles up the river, the kind of clam bakes that are rare today. Starting with a stone-lined pit in the ground which had been prepared, the preparation was heated to a white heat, the ashes were cleaned away and then successive layers of bluefish, chicken, green corn and dozens of clams were covered over to bake into a delectable meal fit for the gods. There were picnics and boating parties in plenty and, when the first college boat race on the big Poughkeepsie rowing regatta was instituted, we knew everyone connected with the management and I saw this first race from the judges' launch, which has spoiled me ever since for anything so distantly dull as an observation train along the bank of the river. In the winter our life became even more exciting with ice-skating and ice-boating on the frozen Hudson. It is an easy cliché to say that the seasons have changed, but our winters then were long and cold and the river was solidly frozen over for weeks.

Skating kept you warm in your own right, but you came back from an icy cruise at lightning speed on an ice-boat almost as frozen as the Hudson. Ice-yachting was a rare sport when one could lie out full length in the tiny cockpit and fly along, often on one runner, racing with the crack trains along the bank and often making a speed of sixty miles an hour. But you wanted it to be cold, knife-blade cold in the moonlight with a big fire glowing on the bank to come back to just when you thought your face and feet would never be able to thaw out again. There was bob-sledding on the long hills in town where ten or twelve of us would pile ourselves on the long sled and start off on what seemed to us a perilous trip. We always found some friendly horses and driver who would pull us up the hill again to repeat the performance. Sometimes in the evening and effectively chaperoned, a dozen or fifteen youngsters would pile into a long, four-horse sled, packed with straw, and drive out into the country to a special farmhouse where huge bowls of oyster stew would be waiting when the sled's runners creaked in the yard. On the way home we sang like frogs in the spring, sang "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and "Seeing Nellie Home" and "Clementine" and "After the Ball Is Over" and that song about a bicycle built for two.

Whether in town or country things were simply and generously managed in my world. The who



family were always going on visits into the country, old-fashioned, pre-commuter Dutchess County country, perhaps to a relative's house, perhaps to that of a prosperous farmer who was a client of Father's. The home was always a lovely old place and completely innocent of heating in the bedrooms. The family were usually realists and slept in woolen sheets all winter. But, winter or no, we city folks, who also were guests of honor, had beautiful home-woven linen sheets on our beds and froze to death in consequence. It was worth it, however, in view of the breakfast you would get after arising and dressing with your breath smoking in front of you. You breakfasted in the comfortable great kitchen, cheek by jowl with the huge Dutch oven where the bread was baked and all the other cooking done over the roaring fire; breakfasted on huge bowls of oatmeal, ham and eggs, sausage and pork chops, steak, fried potatoes, stacks of hot biscuits and mounds of griddle cakes. Those breakfasts are among my most vivid childhood memories and I cannot today pass the old Perkins place on the South Road without a nostalgic feeling for the wholly lovely week ends I have spent there. There's no denying it, children are greedy little things and to make an impression on their stomachs is the sure way to be remembered.

At appropriate seasons, in town, there were candy-pulls, more formal luncheons, dances galore with the fast and swooping waltzes, the polka and the redowa, for dancing was active exercise in those days. We had many cotillions then with gay favors, cotillions which we began in our dancing-school days and I kept up until I left home. There were the gay balls which followed the annual visits of the Yale or Harvard or Amherst College Glee Club to our town. One of my loveliest remembrances is of the year when I was lame and the entire Amherst Glee Club came up to our house in the afternoon and gave me, as sole audience, their entire program of the evening's concert to which I couldn't go. In the summer, in later years, there was tennis; I became a fairly acceptable player and won many tournaments in the Hudson River towns. I do not mean that all this happened when I was a child. It is all mixed up in my memory for, until I was seventeen, the world was a unit with no gaps or turning points. It all seems very hectic and gay as I look back upon it.

Of course I can find a few special characteristics creeping out, if I look for them. Trying to make up to Father for being a girl, which went right on even after the next arrival delighted the household by being a boy, did turn me into a tomboy type in the early days. I was an enthusiastic baseball player and trout-fisher and still like both of these amusements fifty years later. My pet reading was neither Elsie Dinsmore nor fairy stories, but the classic stories of Horatio Alger, Jr., and *Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks with a Circus* as it appeared in that lovable old magazine, *Harper's Young People*. The circus was very important in my life. The night before the circus came to town, my brother and I always went to bed with strings tied to our toes and dangling out of the windows. Our confederate was the local Poughkeepsie bad boy, whom we were forbidden to know and whom, in consequence, we cultivated on every possible occasion. As soon as the circus arrived, he ran to our house and jerked the strings. We got up, dressed and crept out and went down to the circus lot where they were unloading elephants and erecting tents with shouting and heaving on ropes and hammering in stakes with smashing sledges and hammers, all in the weird, savage light of kerosene flares. Then, so dazzled and excited we felt a little sick, back we stole just as it was getting light, undressed and got back into bed in time to be summoned from below: "Children! Get up at once or you will be late for school!" Lots of other Poughkeepsie youngsters would be unaccountably drowsy in school on circus day, but they were all boys except me. And for weeks after the circus left my brother and I did nothing but play at being "Mademoiselle Jeannette and Monsieur Ajax, the World's Most Graceful and Daring Aerial Artistes" on the trapeze in our play-house.

My brother and I also collaborated in the manufacture and use of tick-tacks, particularly for the stirring up of two rather timid middle-aged ladies who lived next door. Our style of tick-tack consisted of a long cord, a small pebble and a pin. You put the pin in the window sash so the pebble dangle

against the pane and then stood far off and gently twitched the other end of the cord, which made the pebble rap insistently on the glass—tap-tap-tap . . . tap-tap-tap . . . until the frightened ladies roused up, the gas was lighted, and quavering voices were heard: "Who's there?" As soon as there was any risk of detection, you gave a hearty tug on the cord, which pulled out the pin and removed all traces of the crime. Occasionally we moved farther afield and stirred up other mystified households.

Tick-tacks were not, however, part of our Hallowe'en program. Hallowe'en was just a matter of parties where you bobbed for apples and walked backward down the cellar-stairs looking into a mirror for a possible glimpse of your future husband—for girls anyway. The boys were apparently more active, since the horse-block, which then stood in front of every house with the householder's name carved on it like a tombstone, was usually found next morning overturned into the gutter and a good many gates would be temporarily missing. I always had the impression that part of Father's and Mother's idea in giving us Hallowe'en parties was to keep us in the house and out of mischief. We did not wear funny costumes on Hallowe'en, however. That was the custom at Thanksgiving when we dressed ourselves in Mother's clothes and went to call on our neighbors. Youngsters had little to do with New Year's except to stay at home in their best clothes and make raids on the sandwiches and cakes which surrounded the open-house punch bowl. Everyone kept open house on New Year's Day; the ladies stayed at home and "received" and the gentlemen paid calls to all the ladies they knew. It was a fine old-fashioned custom that called for a steady head. By the time a widely acquainted bachelor had paid thirty or forty calls and drunk a cup of punch to a happy New Year for the household at every point of call, he was likely to be precariously merry and need a good deal of expert steering. I will say for the credit of our visitors, however, that relatively few of them ever disgraced the dignity of the silk hat and Prince Albert coat which was the required uniform for the occasion.

There are all sorts of memories which come back to me of those carefree days. Our domestic circle had an unusual stability during all my years at home. It is a strange commentary upon the changing servant problem of today when I remember that Bridget, the cook, Mary, the maid, Mrs. Uniack, the laundress, and Frances, our colored nurse of blessed memory, were with us always. Frances was our other mother and my love for and sympathy with and understanding of the colored race date back to her and all she meant to us children. There was Smith's candy store on Market Street. It is still there but without the presence of William and Andrew Smith with their delectable beards and their great sense of fine citizenship. They may be known now as "Trade" and "Mark," but to me they were great men and their generosity to the town remains as their monument. There was the old barn on Church Street where they were beginning to manufacture the cough drops which were to make them famous; then little known and made in a primitive way. We children used to go in to watch the black drops coming slowly out on narrow sheets of tin and always went away with our pockets full. There were the afternoons much later when Cornelia Kinkead and I used to visit each other and sit for long hours each immersed in a book and rarely speaking to the other. There was our mandolin and guitar club ably led by Anna Haight, who was a distinguished musician and who made us able to give rather charming little musical afternoons. There were "progressive" card parties and the old friendships of kindred souls. All muddled memories, stretching over the years of childhood and youth, and as precious as a reminder of a life in a small town for a young girl in the eighties and nineties. Traditional small-town stuff, it may be, but I doubt if the world offers anything better today. It was a good world that I lived in.

I was thoroughly trained in the business of being a woman. My sister Mary and I went through a rigorous education in cooking and sewing; no superficial bowing acquaintance with cook-stove and sewing-machine, but real work. That was a hold-over from my mother's education and almost necessary when the corner grocery had little but staples on its shelves and the ready-made dress had not yet developed into a major industry. Twice a year the dressmaker came to the house and stayed s

weeks at a time making summer or winter outfits for Mother, my sister and myself, and part of her job was to make seamstresses of Mary and me. I could make my own clothes now, if I wanted to. Modern clothes would be all too simple. I was trained when a dress was a dress, a creation of complicated architecture, stiffened with whalebone, gored, ruffled, covered with darts and loops and fancy stitching.

Cooking was the same way. Every year we put up a year's supply of jams and jellies and preserves and it was a family tradition that no daughter of the house could qualify as on the way to growing up until she could cook a dinner that would pass muster with Father. And he was a severe judge. Father liked his food and had high standards in culinary matters, so I know I am a good cook. I do not cook and I do not like to cook and I have not done it for many years, but I feel quite confident that I could walk out into my own kitchen tomorrow and bake bread that would be a credit to our old Bridget. And I can still manage a coal range, which is becoming a lost art among town-bred young women.

Summers were mostly spent at my grandmother's in Dansville, the loveliest of little towns nestling at the head of the Genesee Valley in New York State. Our house in Poughkeepsie was sizable, but it was cramped in comparison to Grandmother's white-pillared place on Elizabeth Street. There was always plenty of room even though my grandmother had seven children and six of them married and had families and they all sent all of the grandchildren to her in the summer. And plenty of welcome too: I cannot understand how either the house or Grandmother's patience held together, but it was a sturdy old building and she was the kindest and least irritable of old ladies and unmistakably loved having us there.

Every year I revelled in Dansville and the effects will never wear off. Just last year, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, I read a story by Hugh MacNair Kahler about a small town which gave me a strange, reminiscent feeling; the background was slight but I knew that place. We live now in the Kahler home in Princeton, and the next time I saw my landlord I asked him if he had any particular place in mind when he wrote that story. "Why yes," he said, "but you have probably never been there; very few people have. It's a little town in upstate New York called Dansville." Whereupon it developed that he had been raised in the place and was one of the MacNair grandchildren with whom we Brown grandchildren had played—and presumably fought—summer after summer.

I have an idea that he has obtained a great deal of material for his stories from Dansville. If it were not for the limitations of this book and the need of getting on to my main purpose in life, I could recite all sorts of minor Dansville sagas, for it is one of those small towns that breed stories. It has a way of staying with you and if you turned me loose today blindfolded in Dansville I should know where I was.

The old town has changed a great deal in these forty-odd years. The bloomer-clad, skull-capped Dutch-cut-haired ladies from old Dr. Jackson's health resort up on the hill are no longer there, and that is a great loss. Dr. Jackson was a fine-looking, white-bearded and jolly old gentleman who had picturesque ideas about health and carried them out to the ultimate degree in this establishment. He frowned on meat, so meat was barred. He believed heartily in eating cereals and fruit, so they were ever present. He made, and had his patients eat, what I believe was the first prepared breakfast food: a really delicious concoction called "granula." I have often been there for supper. The patients sat at long tables in the dining room, between which ran a narrow-gauge railroad track. The huge bell on top of the building clanged once and a handcar heaped with hard graham biscuit, the inevitable "granula" and apple sauce appeared out of the sliding doors at the end of the room. That was supper, washed down with copious glassfuls of water. Dr. Jackson believed even more heartily in the curative properties of a spring up on the hillside above the building. It was called the All-Healing Spring and was just good spring water.

Long ago, Dr. Amelia Bloomer had convinced Dr. Jackson that skirts were a menace to health, so a

of his women patients had to wear the semi-Turkish trousers named after their inventor. There also seemed something lethal about long hair, although I never understood just what it was, which made necessary for the same long-suffering ladies to have their hair cut short in a Dutch bob and wear little skull caps on their heads. They looked very strange and unworldly to this small child. Many of them were apparently sane when observed by an inquisitive little girl down the hill on Dansville's main street. Maybe the doctor's regimen did do them some good; at least he never lacked for patients.

When the doctor died—at eighty-five, a good testimonial for his system of living—his son and daughter-in-law, Drs. James and Kate Jackson, inherited the place and started letting down some of the bars. While they were thinking about this, the Sanitarium burned down. The excitement of this great event prostrated Dansville for days. I was there, at my grandmother's, at that time. I remember a great glare in the sky and the knock on my grandmother's door. When answered, it proved to herald a patient from the Sanitarium who, having been unable to walk for years, had been startled by the cry of fire into getting out of bed, throwing her case of jewels out of the window, deliberately picking up the bowl and pitcher from her washstand and walking in her nightgown all the way down the hill. The bowl and pitcher were just one of those queer things people do in emergencies. I can thus vouch for at least one cure effected in the Jackson Sanitarium. They never did find the jewels.

The Sanitarium was rebuilt in red brick, started up on a much more liberal basis by the younger Dr. Jackson, and prospered exceedingly. The bloomers, the hair-cuts and the skull-caps were discarded and in my medical days I worked there for two summers as a laboratory technician, gaining invaluable practical experience in making analyses and having a very pleasant time. William Dean Howells was there as a patient one summer and having tea with him in the afternoon was a thrilling episode in my young life. The place caught a celebrity like that quite often. Possibly the one that meant the most to me was Louisa M. Alcott. I wish I could remember more about her. She seemed to be just a very gentle and very tired old lady. She was my heroine of all the world at that time, and a proper choice. I was going to strike out on my own in the world, though nothing could have been farther from my thoughts then. For Louisa M. Alcott was, to me, the unattainable ideal of a great woman. *Little Women* and *Little Men* were favorite reading everywhere I turned among girls of my own age and "Jo" in *Little Women* has always been my favorite character in all fiction. I feel a glow of happiness, even today, when I find that these books are still read and loved. And so, to have met Louisa M. Alcott and to have known her, even so slightly, remains one of my precious memories.

The old doctor's grandson, also a doctor, inherited the Sanitarium in his turn and liberalized it still more. It is still there; but it was sold recently to Bernarr Macfadden for a health resort, to be run according to his theories. In other words, it has completed the cycle and come back to where it started from: three generations from cracked wheat to cracked wheat. I hope Mr. Macfadden's patients are as picturesque as old Dr. Jackson's were, but I doubt it. Anyway, I congratulate Mr. Macfadden upon his inheritance of a fine tradition.

I know that New York City has lost a great deal of its dash and glamour since the time when the whole family used to go on board the *Mary Powell*, the queen of the old Hudson River boats, and come to the city for a day of shopping and the theater. Without sounding like a professional admirer of the good old days, I do want to put myself on record to the effect that, whatever its numerous advantages, the modern world does not know how to live as comfortably as did the world of the nineties. There are no more hotels like the old Fifth Avenue Hotel, where we always stayed, with its palatial, roomy black-tiled lobby and its mammoth bedrooms full of carved black walnut furniture (the huge comfortable beds cured countless cases of insomnia) and those enormous bills of fare in the restaurant, where you ate three meals a day—getting room, breakfast, lunch and dinner for five dollars per person. It would have taken half an hour merely to read the breakfast menu through, so you stopped somewhere down among the tenderloin steaks and baked potatoes and ordered anything you

thought of, secure in the well-justified confidence that it would be forthcoming.

I have a nostalgic feeling for the theater in those days too. After the lapse of years it is impossible for me to get all of the actors into their proper places. (There are plenty of books that will tell you all that, but I know that my education was singularly rich in all the stage could give.) Names come tumbling over themselves in my mind; different years, but all in my younger life. The cozy little Lyceum Theater on the corner of Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue where the seats all folded back so that the whole theater became a sea of aisles. The grand, and new, Empire Theater way uptown at Fortieth Street and Broadway. Both with magnificent stock companies where each player was a star. Weber and Fields Music Hall and the old Tony Pastor place on Fourteenth Street. I saw Sara Bernhardt and heard Adelina Patti sing on the last of her many "farewell tours." There were Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, and I saw Maude Adams and Ethel Barrymore make their debuts. The music halls gave their quota: Lottie Collins, whose Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay set all the town singing; Weber and Fields, Blanche Ring, Vesta Tilley, Cecilia Loftus, Della Fox, Willie Collier, Albert Chevalier, Dan Daly, Lillian Russell, Nat Goodwin and DeWolf Hopper. I know I have left many out of this long ago list but it was a rich galaxy and I am glad to have lived so long if only to have seen and heard them all.

The stores we patronized were all quite handy to the old horse-drawn streetcar that brought us over from the dock where the *Mary Powell* landed because few if any stores had then crept above Twenty-third Street. The famous Delmonico's, just above Madison Square, was almost as far north as we ever went on these trips. Many of the names will sound familiar to modern ears, but the locations are changed now. Arnold Constable's and Lord & Taylor's were on Broadway near Seventeenth Street. Altman's at Sixth Avenue and Eighteenth Street right on the Elevated, where no smart store would dream of being now; McCreery's on Broadway below Twenty-third Street and Macy's still at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. Three large department stores of those days are blessed memories: Simpson, Crawford & Simpson, O'Neill's, and the famous "Meet me at the Fountain" emporium of Siegel-Cooper. By lunch time we probably got down as far as the old St. Denys Hotel, opposite Grace Church, and a lunch there was something to dream about, even better than the good French cooking they served you at the sit-up counter at Purcell's across the street.

Today's youngsters evidently think that a girl's life in the nineties must have been unendurably confining, to match those elaborate whalebone-stiffened clothes she wore. But it seems to me that there is not much that today offers which would compensate for the gay and free days of my youth. There were a great many more "don'ts" to observe then than there are now. But there were also plenty of occasions when the "don'ts" grew transparent and started you to wondering what was underneath. There was, for instance, my Aunt Abby who gave me my first acquaintance with skepticism and non-conformity. I could not begin to explain Aunt Abby but I know she was an invaluable part of my education.

She was my father's Aunt, one of a large family of old-fashioned Quakers, whose use of plain language always made ordinary English words sound silvery and beautiful. When I first remember her, she was nearly a hundred years old, a tiny old lady in severe Quaker gray with a white 'kerchief about her neck and her bonnet strings tied underneath her chin in a great gray bow. Quakers have a way of being different without anyone's minding; perhaps I had more of that quality in me than anyone realized. I know that there were two diverse elements in me struggling for expression: the glib social and ambitious expression of my mother's personality and the quiet, taciturn and withdrawn calmness of my father's Quaker upbringing. . . . But to come back to my Aunt Abby. Her particular crotchet was turning day into night, just like Marcel Proust, of all people. She got up and had her breakfast at midnight, ate her dinner when the sun was coming up over the horizon, had her supper at eleven a.m. and then went to bed again at noon. Her son, with whom she lived on a big farm a few

miles outside of Poughkeepsie, would never have dreamed of expostulating with her about her strange habits and she lived in one wing of the big house with her own maid to look after her.

So, if you wanted to see my great-aunt Abby, you had to get up at the crack of dawn in order to finish the long carriage ride out from town before she went to bed. We children were always eager to go for reasons of our own: we knew Aunt Abby's diabolical and thoroughly enticing secret, and Father and Mother did not. As soon as we arrived, Mother and Uncle James went off about their own concerns and left us children to Aunt Abby's ministrations. Then the thrilling performance began. Aunt Abby would settle her little self on the big old mahogany-and-haircloth sofa with the sampler on the wall over her head, her feet propped on a mahogany footstool embroidered with a gay parrot, rang us in front of her on a haircloth footstool apiece, and call for her Bible. It was a colossal volume which practically smothered her when it was opened across her lap. The remarkable old lady never wore glasses and with her keen eyesight she would read us a Bible story, the most incredible she could find: it might be Jonah and the whale, or the three Israelites in the fiery furnace, or perhaps Daniel in the lions' den. It must have made a very pretty picture like an old steel engraving out of a child's book. The old lady, so long past the allotted three score years and ten, reading the Scripture to three curly-headed youngsters. She always read the story with much earnestness and we hung on each word. The closing the book, she would look up at us benignly and say:

"Now, children, that is a very silly story. I am an old, old lady and I want all of you to remember what I am saying. It is a silly story and there is not a word of truth in it. Don't ever let anyone tell you that stories like that are true. . . . Jane! Cookies!" Then we ate the cookies and enjoyed them almost as much as this secret display of thrilling skepticism. When Mother returned, she always heard only that Aunt Abby had been reading us Bible stories. We all continued regularly to go to Sunday school without rebellion, but it was hardly possible for us to take much stock in Jonah and the whale from that time on. It would probably be hard to exaggerate the influence that sort of experience may have on a child, learning so early that it is possible to question the unquestionable. We were thoroughly impressed but, although Aunt Abby never asked us not to, we never told anyone of these shocking adventures. When she died at the age of one hundred and six, we children were the only ones who knew her secret. Everyone else assumed that she died as she had apparently lived, an ardent and absolutely believing Quaker. That was so long ago that it can do no harm to tell about it now. And I am not so sure, as I look back on this, of its effect on each of us. My sister, Mary, became a religious devotee and her complete interest in life was the so-called "High Church" branch of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Perhaps my mind was fertile soil for that seed: I know it was the beginning of my desire to question the right and wrong of all accepted doctrines.

This all sounds as though life, for me, was a round of good times and active gaieties. Life in my family with so energetic a mother had to be that but there was no lack of formal education. I was extremely fond of the school to which I was sent. My attendance there covered all of my school life except for one year when, for some inexplicable reason, I was sent to another private school which carried out its educational regime under the accepted plan. But I was not altogether happy or content there, and the following year saw me back in my old environment to stay until my college years. This was a highly unusual school, of a type practically unheard of fifty years ago, although some of its peculiarities have much in common with the most advanced of modern educational methods. The school was the private effort of the Misses Thomas, two extremely large ladies who much resembled the late Elisabeth Marbury, in a lovely, peaceful old house on Academy Street, full of exquisite old furniture and a sense of overwhelming calm which impressed the most rambunctious little girl the moment she entered. Miss Sarah conducted the teaching and Miss "Lib" the housekeeping, for there were six or seven boarders among the thirty-odd pupils. They were both impressive people. Miss Sarah was stern and dignified but "Miss Lib" was known through all Dutchess County for her bubbling

sense of humor and her ready wit. Once, for instance, when we were driving with her out into the country, we were being badly bothered by a buggy ahead which was smothering us with dust. Presently someone saw that the driver in the buggy ahead was the local undertaker, which made the situation about as dismal as possible. "Oh, I don't know," said Miss Lib, "I'd rather take his dust than have him take mine." One can still hear stories about Miss Lib, in Poughkeepsie.

So far as the academic side went, the school itself was strangely modern in its plan of study. There were no graded classes, no marks or reports, no examinations, not even any commencement exercises. When Miss Sarah was satisfied that you knew enough mathematics, Latin, French, English, or the elementary sciences, she told you so and all of the women's colleges of that time took her certification of a student's preparation as sufficient for entrance requirements without a shadow of question. The classes were small and rather informal affairs with only three or four girls in each group, usually held around a table in some upstairs room. You progressed strictly according to your ability to master the particular course. If you had a special piece of work to do, you took your own time to master it without urging. The teachers were nearly all college-bred women and the instruction was fine and thorough. Discipline was hardly needed, so beautifully did this pair of fine, shrewd women manage their charges. The most severe punishment meted out was having to stay in school after hours and learn twenty or thirty lines of some famous poem before going home. That took a good deal of time theoretically, but practically we soon learned what the poems would be—it was always the same one until we could recite it all. So we would learn the poem ahead of time, take half an hour or so during our punishment after school to make it seem plausible and then go free. For years and years after I left home I could still recite *Thanatopsis*, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and parts of *The Idylls of the King*.

I have no idea where the Misses Thomas evolved their plan of conducting a school along the latitudinarian lines, any more than I can conceive how they managed to run it so successfully and smoothly that way. Naturally their curious ideas struck many residents of Poughkeepsie as too queer to be safe and there was a large body of substantial citizenry who insisted upon sending their daughters to the town's other and more conventional schools. But many of what I believe to have been the more progressive people, Father among them, were heartily in favor of it and I am very glad that his mind was tuned to that decision. It was splendid preparation for a child who would presently have to study on her own. By the time I was sixteen I was prepared to enter any women's college in the country and in Latin and mathematics could have been eligible for entrance to the Sophomore year.

There had never been any question about my entering Vassar, which was already as familiar to me as my own face in the mirror. But then things began to happen with devastating swiftness. That was just my private calamity out of a series of calamities which went far toward shattering our family and jarred me out of the life I was apparently destined to lead.

When I was sixteen my brother died suddenly. He was only thirteen years old but a fine and promising lad and the one boy in a family of girls. Three months later Father died of typhoid. In those days typhoid was the scourge of Poughkeepsie and no wonder, since the town water supply was drawn from the Hudson just below the outlet of the sewer from the large Asylum for the Insane above the town. The epidemic of typhoid that winter had one good effect: it resulted in the installation of the first American filtration plant for a town's water supply. Father's typhoid was serious enough, but we all knew it was rather a lack of will to live that killed him. My brother's death had taken all the zest for life from him. We were an understanding trio—my father, my brother, and myself—and when they died so close together there seemed very little left to live for.

Perhaps it was just as well that financial troubles appeared so soon after Father's funeral to make us all think of something else. We had always had a comfortable home and enough money, and Father had saved too. But when the estate came to be settled, a recent series of losses and bad investments told the inevitable story of practically nothing left. It was immediately evident that somebody would

have to get ready to earn a living for all three of us—my mother, my sister, who had always been delicate and a semi-invalid, and myself. I considered myself elected. It was a hard struggle to give up Vassar but there was not enough money left to pay for that and for any additional preparation for professional life. I had long talks with Dr. Taylor who was then President of Vassar, and with Professor Leach who was determined that I should follow my original plan. A scholarship was read for me but time loomed large when I thought of nine or ten years of study. I made my own decision after months of agonizing debate, and in the end it was decided that Mother and Mary should live home and I should take five thousand of the few precious dollars remaining, go to New York and study to be a doctor.



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