

AL/1871

Bedford College

Feb 25th, 1883.

Very dear Parents

Last week has been more lively than most here, and I have had more opportunities of getting to know ^{some of} the day-girls which I was anxious to do.

On Tuesday Evening, Miss Martin had her "at Home".

Tea and coffee was served in the hall, and then we wandered about, chiefly in the Studio, for about half an hour after which they took to "tripping

the light fantastic toe."

They rather stand on ceremony here in some matters and it is not considered proper to speak to any of the girls till we have been formally introduced. Of course, if I've got anything to say, I don't care for that, but there are some girls to whom I wanted to know and who would have thought me very forward if I had addressed them. So on that evening I was introduced to two very interesting specimens the first was ^{Miss} Harris. I wish I could draw a portrait of her but I must try to describe her. She is extremely masculine-looking

has a strong face, with a decided chin; her hair is short and parted down the middle. She wears a gentlemanly Albert chain with a bunch of seals, - most masculine rings on her hands. Her dress is very plain, with a turn-down collar, - a white stand up collar inside, with a little tie, - of the sort father used to wear, but narrower. To complete the picture she wears blue goggles when reading. Her voice is deep & her manner rather blunt. Everyone laughs at her very much at first, but everyone gets to like her immensely afterwards. We were talking about the skeleton in the studio when she remarked "I had one of my own once" (meaning of course somebody else's). This led to the discovery that she has studied

medicine for two years in Paris. I think her history must be rather interesting. According to her own account she is "one of the Upper Ten", but has come down to the middle class, for their good, I fancy. She thinks everyone has a sphere, and is now engaged in experiments on all kinds of spheres to see which will fit her.

She began to talk about our aesthetes, - and expressed her wish to be introduced to the chief of them Miss Harraden. She being the other interesting specimen I spoke of, I will try to ~~do~~ give you an idea of her. I don't so much care to draw her, for you can see a flattering portrait ~~do~~ in one of

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Punch's aesthete, any day.

She is short & slim, with a large quantity of light brown frizzy hair. Her nose is long, her top lip infinitely small, & this with her eyeglasses gives her a decidedly peculiar expression.

She is a poetess, - and composes lyrics with such titles as "weary worn". She is now engaged on a "Pastoral" but she can only write it when she "feels light-hearted".

This then, was the being to whom Miss Harris wished to be introduced. This was effected & we watched eagerly for the result. We thought they would each disgust the other, but like the opposite poles of a magnet they were strongly attracted. They

stood talking for five minutes and then to our astonishment sat down vis-à-vis, in close conversation. After nearly half an hour they separated, and then I got introduced to Miss Harrod, & I found her much better than I expected. She certainly has peculiar views on many subjects but she is pleasant & talks like a rational being on the whole. We discussed conventionalities, - drawing - poetry, - ~~and~~ &c. &c. I think she considered me rather heterodox in matters poetical because I could not say that I thought the expression "tearful tears" other than silly & meaningless. However she offered to lend

me Morris' "Epic of Hades", which I was very glad to accept and I am now reading it.

After this there was not much to do except to watch the dancers. I talked to one or two of the girls & introduced myself to a solitary individual who I think was one of the old girls.

About 10.0 o'clock I went to bed, & soon after the assembly broke up.

On the whole it was very nice though rather uninteresting for those who did not dance, and I was very tired before the end.

On Thursday, we had a debate on the Relative Influence

of the Poet and the Statesman.

It was rather a lively debate though few took part in it.

Miss Ada James the sister of a student, opened it for the poet.

Miss Townsend, - an old student replied. Neither speech was strong tho' the first converted Miss Harris & the second Miss Harraden, who were sitting together most lovingly.

There followed an awful pause which I broke, speaking for the poet.

Then Miss Harris ~~spoke~~ made four short speeches in succession with others coming in at the intervals.

Finally she proposed an amendment that the two were incomparable which was carried by an immense majority. Miss Harris brought in several medical & algebraical allusions, & was tremendously cheered.

afterwards in the Hall, Miss Harris told us about a Debate at University College the previous evening, in which it was decided by a majority of three "that the inferiority of women is not proven." She holds that we have never had fair physical conditions, & that if the world were sent to bed & doctored for 50 years, we could then start afresh with a fair chance.

We would use every means to be healthy, - euthanasia, - if necessary. ~~You~~

You will think I have got Miss Harris on the brain, but she really is a most

interesting character something quite different to anyone I have ever seen, - very original and frank, but I think not conceited. Everyone here is quite excited about her.

I forget whether I told you that Dr. Landels is leaving the Chapel here. He is to preach his farewell sermon this evening. There is to be a tea meeting to "farewell him" & on Tuesday, to which Bessie Toome is going. If I feel extra strong perhaps I shall go too. But I think I am really taking great care about not getting tired & about lying down, - though I

get rather sick of it sometimes. I wish I could invent some new way of doing my hair, or that I could cut it off for it is uncomfortable to lie down on.

Best love to Oliver & Gertie

Your very affectionate daughter
Helen M. Wilson

P. S. I don't know what is going to be done about Easter. But I think none of the others have holidays when I have, - so I should be rather dull. May I ask Berta Robertson to come home with me? I am sure you

would like her. She is a really sensible thoughtful girl, - more a real friend than any girl I have known, I think. I don't know why I have said nothing about her before, but I really have liked her for a long time.

Please tell me if it is not convenient, & what time of the holidays would suit you best.

Your very loving

Helen