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Home Economics Looks Ahead

by Ruth Hackett

WHAT WILL the course in home economics be like when the Division of Home Economics celebrates its Centennial Anniversary?

A forward looking writer, Edward Bellamy, thought that home economics would become a system of public works. When he wrote “Looking Backward” in 1887 he prophesied for the year A.D. 2000: “Our women have quite too much spirit to be mere beneficiaries of society, even as a return for ornamenting it. They welcome being relieved from housework because that was wasteful as compared with the cooperative plan. They are members of the industrial army and leave it only when maternal duties claim them.”

Present Improvements

Bellamy included electricity as the power to be utilized and spoke of public kitchens, laundries and repair shops on a city-wide scale. Some of the improvements he described are facts now. The use of electricity for heating and lighting, the style of the little house instead of dusty mansions, public laundries and the career woman are examples of his prophecies.

This indicates that home economics in the colleges will continue to expand in the next 75 years. The homemaker will be doing one special part of the homemaking job for many others. This will give her the chance for specialization in one particular job which attracts her.

This specialization will not mean that homes themselves will disappear. Dr. P. Mabel Nelson, dean of the Division of Home Economics, believes that homes are such an important part of the whole psychology of a human being that they will never disappear. Perhaps the work of the home will be done outside it, but families will still continue to live as units in individual homes.

College Specialization

The future of specialization can be seen from the trends of home economics at Iowa State. How unusual a Department of Child Development would have been to a student in Domestic Science in 1872? What was formerly a course in child care has grown up to become a whole department in the division. Perhaps at the Centennial Anniversary there will be representatives from the Departments of Adolescent Care, Radio Home Economics or Crafts. Judging from the past, specialization is bound to increase.

Today, with the general fields of work laid out in the field of home economics, research workers are digging deeper and deeper to find more facts. This concentrated effort to spread more knowledge is also going to make an impression. People raised on the very best diet may be common place in the Centennial year. We’ll see taller, more handsome individuals with clearer mental and physical equipment.

The facts of child psychology should help straighten out the quirks of human nature as we know them now. It will be easier to get along with your neighbor. As each section of home economics pushes toward its ideal goal, the world should be straightened out a little more.

A longer life span will give women more time to do a better job of everything. They will have better health and time to follow more of the cultural interests.

One Phase Training

Because specialization will remove the necessity for a jack-of-all-trades training, home economics will be more attractive. A woman will choose one phase of it of her own free will. She will also become more of an economic and legal equal part of the family. The alumna who comes to the Centennial celebration at Iowa State will still be following the career for which she studied in college, even though she’s married. The work of her household will be reduced to a bare minimum.

This may mean another change in the curriculum of the home economics student in the Centennial year. The course will be more valuable to the woman if it includes courses which will broaden her knowledge. She will need philosophy, literature and knowledge of the arts to counteract the specificity of the future.

This complication may also involve more training in the high schools. The basic and elementary home economics courses could be taught in the lower grades to provide more time in college for liberal arts.

The peace-time uses of atomic energy may mean another whole section of work in home economics. As soon as it is adapted to cake-mixers and perpetually-warm space heaters, the science of homemaking will become even more complicated.