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Home Economics in Great Britain

By Thelma Carlson

Editor's Note: Thelma Carlson submitted this winning essay in the Omicron Nu Essay Contest conducted among Freshman English girl-students at Iowa State College during the Winter Quarter of 1929.

As we see the Iowa State College seal with the words, "Science with practice," it is natural that we home economics students think of home economics. We may just think of it as it exists in the state, or in the United States, or even in the whole world. I wonder if we have the general idea that it is the same in the different parts of the world as we find it in our country. Is it possible for us to realize how new it is in some countries and what little advance it has made in others. By taking various parts of the British Empire it is possible to get a better idea of the advance in some countries are making. If we think first of our next door neighbor, Canada, we would expect her to be quite well started, for if nothing else, she may use our ideas. Home economics has gained quite a place there. Of all the provinces of Canada, British Columbia is the furthest ahead. It has by far the most home economics teachers, even twice as many as the next highest, Manitoba. In British Columbia they have what they call a provincial director and have organized a group which is to raise eighty thousand dollars with which to endow a chair of home economics at the University of Columbia. Throughout the whole of Canada more and more students are taking the course every year.

We all know that Great Britain has control of much of South Africa. In the whole of Africa there are only two home economics departments. Both of these departments are in need of suitable persons for their heads. Here are great opportunities for some one. "National Aspects of Home Economics," states that, "The diamonds of South Africa mines are not more satisfying than the rewards of successful teaching."

India, which is another dependency of Great Britain, shows quite an advance in home economics, especially in baby welfare. Though these women are quite a bit different from the American and English women they have taken a great interest in it. The women of India have a quite different philosophy of life, but even with their different philosophy it is thought that they will develop their home economics into something just as practical and just as efficient, with probably even more beauty than our home economics.

Now let us take Great Britain proper. Though Great Britain has done and is doing quite a bit in the way of advancement, we see she was a little slow in getting started. When the women in the United States changed the name domestic science to home economics they were doing a lot, for they were spreading out the boundaries of the subject and were enlarging it a great deal. In Great Britain the name hasn't even been changed and they still cling to the old names, domestic science and household arts.

They did, however, soon realize that if domestic science was to make any advancement they must make it into a course which would be recognized by the University of London. This task was not so very easy. If the course was to be a real science the student would have to learn the why as well as the how. Probably England's first advance was made after she first recognized those subjects which could be considered the "adequate foundations" of the course. These included physiology and chemistry, domestic and personal hygiene, maternity and child-welfare and economics. As soon as her colleges began to use such a base for the course she began to progress.

Throughout England there are twenty colleges giving instruction in home economics. In London alone there are three. Besides all these there are polytechnic schools, evening schools and continuation schools. All of these are recognized by the board of education, which also has the responsibility of giving the examinations to the teachers. After 1900, however, they will no longer give the examinations but will continue to inspect the schools. The task of examinations will probably be taken by the universities, and the colleges will be expected to keep in touch with them.

Elementary education in England includes the education of the children of the working class who leave school at the age of fourteen. As home economics is taught in all these schools every girl has an opportunity for some study in it.

The secondary schools include the municipal schools, independent schools and boarding schools and are attended by the upper class and also the middle class, who usually leave school from the ages sixteen to eighteen. In some of these schools the domestic subjects are offered as a substitution for science or mathematics. Some schools do not even offer household art, some make it compulsory, and some make it optional. It is easy enough to see that it would not always be the brightest girl who would choose the course, for she is usually looking forward to a university education and her schedule is filled with other subjects. As home economics is not popular in the secondary schools, it is not surprising that many of the girls having secondary education have no training in it during this time.

King's College is probably the best college in England for training in home economics. The course here lasts three years. During the first two years the foundation studies are stressed most and only a little instruction and practice in the household arts are given. By this time the student is supposed to choose whether she is to specialize for teaching or for institutional administration, and during the third year most of the time is spent in those subjects which pertain to her specialty. The students receiving their degree here are successful in their positions, but still there is quite a bit of criticism. It is believed there is too much attempted; and on the other hand, that there is too little craft taught in the course.

Another important school is the University of Bristol. It offers a four year course and works in connection with the Gloucestershire Training College of Domestic Science. A comparison between this university and King's College can hardly be made as they are so different and each has merits of its own.

England is looking forward to a big future in home economics and is advancing quite rapidly. Of course she is doing...
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