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Godey's Lady's Book

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GRANDMOTHER'S kitchen was toasty warm and fragrant with the odor of baking cookies. I sat with my legs curled about her hand-carved stool and listened to her talk as she worked. Grandmother was a startling person—for all of her 75 years she was as up-to-date on all phases of homemaking as the most ambitious home economics graduate.

Revolutionary in 1890
Treasured in 1951—it's

Godey's
Lady's Book

by Patricia Binder
Technical Journalism Junior

"You like Iowa State, don't you?" she asked. "I hope you learn as much as they try to teach you. And whatever you do, don't take anything for granted. In my mother's day it was a different story. Education of any sort for women was frowned upon, especially any education dealing with the home. A woman in those days was a slave to her home. She was not given a chance to try out any new ideas or educate herself in worldly affairs. The man was the only one allowed any education or expression of ideas.

"I especially remember the stories my mother used to tell me about a great woman of her times, Sarah Josepha Hale. Mrs. Hale was a woman with insight far beyond her years, but she didn't try to force her ideas upon the slower members of the generation as did the more flaming-tempered reformers. Rather, she used more subtle means—she played upon men's vanities and appealed to them to get what she wanted for her fellow homemakers.

"You've probably heard about Godey's Lady's Book. To the women of that day it was the last word in fashions, new ideas and reform movements. Mrs. Hale edited this book for many years. She was the first woman ever to edit a magazine, and it was the most widely circulated magazine of her time. Families in wealthy Boston homes or those in small cabins in the West read and treasured each copy of the Lady's Book.

Cruel Schoolmasters

"Child development majors at Iowa State would wonder at the cruelty of schoolmasters in those days. Their floggings took place continually. Such punishments as fingernail beating, which caused the nails to turn black and fall off, were not uncommon. Mrs. Hale in her Lady's Book pleaded for these little children, saying: 'Little children are always active. To repress their high spirits is the object of most parents. Fathers and mothers, let it be your sacred duty to make home happy for your children.'

Along the education line, she helped organize Vassar College, the first school of collegiate rank for women. She supported the idea of physical training for women, and was delighted when Vassar included such 'vigorous' games as archery, croquet and shuttlecock in its curricula. Vassar also took a radical step and encouraged students to invite sunburn and freckles, which before had been avoided by the 'ladies.'

"Double boilers and rotary egg-beaters, common machines of the modern kitchen, were great inventions in Mrs. Hale's day because of the time they saved; she wrote long editorials on their usefulness. All cookbooks of her day called for quarts of cream 'whipped until stiff,' and dozens of eggs 'whipped' 'til they stand alone.' Imagine trying to whip them with a fork!

"Mrs. Hale realized that an egg-beater was an important invention if it saved even an ounce of energy. 'There can be no education without leisure, and without leisure, education is worthless,' she said again and again. That idea was constantly behind the magazine she edited.

Lingerie New Word

"Along the line of femininity, Mrs. Hale introduced a new word to the vocabulary: lingerie. She then explained that this included 'everything of the under wardrobe.' She emphasized the importance of lingerie, an unheard-of idea then. One reader wrote in, 'Why spend money on what nobody is going to see?'

"Mrs. Hale hit upon every phase of the woman's life during her editorial reign—those of mother, educator and homemaker. She stressed personal good looks and personality, reflection of taste in the home through furnishings and decorations, and keeping up with the times through education and travel. When Mrs. Hale advocated home economics for Vassar, she said: 'The whole process of homemaking, housekeeping and cooking, which has been woman's special providence, should be looked on as an art and a profession, since these duties properly performed require the exercises of the best qualities of mind and heart.'"