

Vassar as it impressed a "poet" in 1871

Extracts from the Diary of Miss Bertha Keffer of '76\* (see following page)

Monday January 16th

Thursday Etta and I went to see Miss -- about one hundred and twelve.

B. "We want to change our room."

E. "We thought Eve would like to room together on the fifth floor."

Miss -- "There is no room vacant there."

E. & B. together "Yes, one hundred and twelve is."

Miss -- slowly. "Yes if you want to go there without any bed, and sleep on the floor you can." to E. "Why do you wish to change your room?"

E. "My room-mate is not very agreeable."

Miss -- to B. "Is anything of that sort the matter with you?"

B. O no, my room-mate and parlor are very nice and I like them ever

so much, but we thought we would like to room together."

Miss -- "Would you like to go to the first floor for the sake of rooming together?"

E. Not liking that a bit, but not liking to back out now, "Yes ma'am."

Miss -- "Well, I will see what I can do for you." To B., "You may go."

Miss -- left E. and told her how much good she might do to her room-mate by staying put and behaving like a Christian, to try it on that plan a month longer."

As soon as we had definitely arranged to go w Miss -- I felt sorry but could not very well back out then. Guess now I'll stay fixed and not trouble her any more.

\* Miss Keffer belonged to the class of '75 but having to remain at home her senior year she graduated with '76.

Tuesday January 17th

President Raymond gave quite a lecture this morning on loyalty -- a word he thought we did not know the meaning of. I guess something disloyal in his sense of the word came up in Faculty Meeting yesterday. We always have something new after the big folks talk us over.

Wednesday January 18th

Heard today of Miss -- slapping a girl over the fingers for not playing rightly, and so now despise her more than ever. The President told of Roger Sherman slapping his boy, and being slapped by his mother, and then kissing her hand and leading her to a seat.

Thursday January 19th

Mrs. Lyman requested through the president this evening that we try being quiet in the corridors in our talk, until Monday, and see how we like the change.

Monday January 23rd

Had a gay time tonight at supper over the professor's baby. Laughed till we tired. Something was the matter with the three waiters and they had to go out to laugh. It is curious to see them when they are feeling funny and Solomon looks at them. I am glad it is not against the rule for preps to laugh.

Thursday February 2nd

I wish it were the June examination instead of February. I wish the Faculty had to be examined before a lot of people twice a year, when we are. They would soon do away with all such botherations.

Friday February 3d

Thus endeth the two days of torture. I agree with Mr. J. in saying "Pity the sorrows of a poor young woman." Mrs. Lyman's corridor is covered all over with matting and her sister is here, so I suppose she is worse.

Friday February 10th

Saw in the paper yesterday, that a diary to be of any use ought to be truthful and one ought never to leave it unwritten for several days and then fill them all in at once without noting the fact. Therefore, I acknowledge this to be written on Saturday instead of Friday. Now my conscience is clear.

Saturday February 11'

Principal events of today, were the meetings of the Student Association. It abolished the Transcript because the Faculty would not let it be published quarterly instead of yearly; and intends to send a printed circular to Exchanges notifying them of this action. The Student Association also resolved that each student should send a notice to her corridor teacher of what she particularly abominated in our face. At noon another meeting was held and they decided to send a written note instead of a circular to their exchanges, and voted against that way of altering our eatables, and decided on masterly inaction for the present.

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Friday February 17

Meditated all silent time on what I would probably have to do after leaving college, and came to the conclusion that I must have some definite aim in view, and fit myself for it, and not keep going on in this blind aimless way. Made up my mind it was not sufficient to try to obey the Golden Rule and to be an accomplished well educated woman, but that I must have something definite in view.

Tuesday February 21

Miss Lyman died today at four o'clock. She peacefully slept away. I first heard of it at the gymnasium. It was curious to see how the girls received the news. Some looked as jolly as they heard it-as they had looked a moment before; some looked grave, and a very few cried. At supper the room was as still as chapel, almost, no one

spoke above a whisper, and the creaking of the waiters shoes was plainly heard. The President made some very fitting remarks in chapel. He said we must not feel sad. Miss Lyman wished us to rejoice that she was gone. Her prayer for days had been not that she might stay, but that she might be made willing to stay.

Wednesday February 22

We had funeral services today in the chapel. There were a great many strangers here from town. All the gallery was filled and downstairs packed. Nearly all the girls had on black entirely. There was a meeting of the Student Association in the morning at which it was decided to send to town for flowers, the Freshmen a wreath, the Sophomores a cross, the Juniors an anchor, the Seniors a crown, the Specials and Preps. cut flowers.

At another meeting it was decided that we all wear crepe for thirty days.

Twenty-three carriages of teachers and visitors went to the train.

Thursday February 23

Day of Prayer for Colleges. Had Chapel services at 11.15, prayer meeting in the afternoon and evening. Heard a good sermon by the Rev. John Hall of New York, a Presbyterian. He is an Irishman and has been in this country only three years. About every evening I think of going to Dr. Avery and saying I want some medicine, but before her office hours the next day, I feel so much better I put it off hoping to get well of myself. I have a great admiration for Dr. A. and if I had anything serious troubling me would go to her.

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Friday February 24

Mina went to Miss--- today. Miss ---  
said she-a-thought-that-a-fruit  
cake-was-a-not necessary, nor-a-  
candy-or-a-raisins-or chickens-a  
-could we strike some of those off?

As we could not help ourselves we struck  
off the cake and raisins and candy. She  
is afraid we will spend too much money  
and "-a-Vassar College-a-has a name  
-a-to be sustained and -a-she wishes  
we would try not to feel her objections as  
restrictions at all, but try and feel  
cheerful over it. It is queer how she can  
imagine in what other way we could  
take them. It is a pity Vassar is  
in such need of a character for solid-  
ity, that we can't have a spree  
once a year.

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Sunday February 26

Last night after I got into bed, I suddenly thought of the basket of remains and hopped out and set it on top of the two pitchers, the basin being filled with water, to keep the mice off. I hear them all going to prayer-meeting but I aint going. The great subject of conversation is Miss S. who has been put back from the Senior class. I pity her, but am not yet sure whether herself or the faculty is most to blame.

Monday February 27

Miss Z. slid neatly over the 21st chapter that we were dreading so, when Prof. H. came in, by tell us to turn directly to the advance in the 22nd. Today we had a whispering exercise beside the breathing and sounds of a in Elocution. I distinguished myself in a very uncomfortable manner in the Latin class, but did better than my associates. It was an abominably hard lesson anyhow

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Wednesday March 1.

The subject of College colors was settled in Student Association meeting today, and we are to send for the number of yards of ribbon we want before Saturday.

Saturday March 4.

Miss Monks and Miss Nichols were the essayists of the evening. The latter's Essay was "A Plea for Charles Dickens" and was first rate. She is a smart girl and thinks correctly of Charles- according to my idea (Miss Keffer had read nearly every one of Dickens' works before she was eleven years old)

The girls in Vassar are the poorest set I ever came across for change or big bills either

I guess, from the way they spoke when I tried to change that X today

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Wednesday March 8.

The President said we would have no new lady principal until next year, but the same arrangement as at present would continue. Did not take off our blankets this morning as ordered.

Friday March 10

Lecture by Robinson - professor of some college and author of our Algebra.

- on "The Real Movers of the World."

About half the girls think it was splendid and the other half think it was abominable. I don't like lectures on Friday evening for we have to study so hard Saturdays in consequence.

Wednesday March 18

Last night - M. & G. were scared because they thought some one was at their window, and they screamed.

This brought in Misses Preston, Swayze and Hamlin. They got quieted down soon and went to rest again. It was kept pretty quiet all day but at night E. R. came up and heard the news

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and said she was going to frighten the girls and sure enough she did. About two hours after - a deputy came up from the 1st South to know if they should barricade their windows to keep people out, and as soon as I got home L. and J. called out to know all the story.

Thursday March 16

M's man is growing. Today the story is that he got in the window and had a heap of jewelry out and was just going off with the watches, and when they screamed he ran. He went through several stages before he got to this Miss H. says he was all made by the watchman shutting down the windows when it began to rain. Anyway it was nice for a little excitement.

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Wednesday March 22

Small explanation this evening on examinations. The three weeks review determines whether we pass in our studies, and the two days are for the benefit of the examining committee. President Raymond made several little jokes about our changing our names and having our pet names go down to posterity. He wants good names, respectable if not beautiful to go into the Vassar Catalogue.

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Thursday May 4th.

Two ladies from Philadelphia, principals of schools have been here. One wears a cap on her head, like a crown. It is trimmed with purple feathers. She looks as Queen Victoria would look if she were an old maid and fixed her hair in little bunches of curls sticking out in front and at the sides under her crown.

Saturday, May 6th

Hope my cold will get well soon. Also that the supply of coal will not give out again this spring, or I will have another cold.

Friday May 12th

Miss C. told us yesterday that a principal of a school, visiting here, said he was much surprised to see that there was communication in every class he saw. As an offset to that Lady A. said she was

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delighted with the girls here because they did not stare her out of countenance.

Saturday May 13th

Went to the Field lecture on French literature last night. It was fine. The President had the lecturer change her subject to "What French will do For You". She said, that even if we learned French pretty well, it would not do us much good in French society, for the people were too selfish and fond of good conversation to invite anyone to their parties, who could not be an ornament to society. French would do us good in reading French writings, memoirs and letters, It would help us in giving entertainments and to secure general converse, instead of paring [sic] off people for the evening.

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Monday May 15th

Heard that the minister who has been here several days, and who preached yesterday, is going to write us up in Scribner's. He appears better in the pulpit than out. It would be well if he could always stay there.

Went to supper with Corinne, and when we saw what a horrid supper there was, we left after pocketing some cookies from our respective tables.

It was well we were in soon or we would have had to stay. An illustration of how the early bird catches the worm.

Saturday May 20th

Have on a summer dress for the first time. This is a good place not to wear out summer clothes in.

Sunday May 21

A nice looking gentleman preached this morning, his sermon full of poetical quotations from Paradise Lost & the Queen of the May. He called this a "unique Seminary," "a seminary of secular learning.

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Tuesday May 30

Had a lecture by the President on the frivolity of the Literary Society. [He objected to the character of the show the Society was going to give] and said too much time was spent on such things for our intellectual growth.

Friday June 2

The President modified his Tuesday night remarks a little Thursday night. May asked me to Delta. The girls had given up the grand show they had expected to have, because of the President's remarks. But they had essays and music and everyone enjoyed it. The one who seemed to enjoy the show least was Miss B's young man. I think the poor fellow may have been scared by the presence of so many of "the sex."

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Tuesday June 13

Nothing to say except that I am no longer a "prep." There was the usual rustle over the chapel when the President said he would read the names of those, who by a vote of the faculty, were admitted to the Freshman class.

Tuesday June 20

Have enjoyed the day exceedingly so far and am now writing the events before packing up my book. Now that we are through I am in a hurry to go away and get out of all this muss. The history of the Senior class by Miss G. was first rate, and the prophecy was very good. The sibyl was rather rough on poor D. and I should think Miss M. would hope the cat would soon be buried and forgotten. Miss F. and Miss L. did well at the tree. The Juniors and Seniors like to fling at one another.

Wednesday June 21

The End.