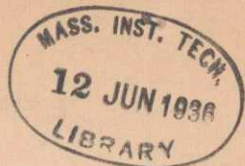


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Life Sketchs

1912

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Ellen H. Richards

SCIENTIST, AUTHOR, TEACHER, APOSTLE
OF THE ART OF RIGHT LIVING

*A Life-Sketch for Home Economics Day*¹

By CAROLINE L. HUNT

Author of Life of Ellen H. Richards, and Home Problems from a New Standpoint

On the third of December, 1842, Ellen H. Richards was born on a farm near the tiny village of Dunstable, in northern Massachusetts. To-day nearly two years after her death, which took place at her home in Jamaica Plain, near Boston, on March 30, 1911, we are celebrating her seventieth birthday, and it is fitting that we should recall the services for which she should be held in grateful remembrance. We are in the habit of celebrating the birthdays of those who have discovered continents, founded nations, or built cities. The opening of continents, the establishment of nations, and the making of cities, however, create a need for noble and efficient citizens, and Mrs. Richards more than any other one person in America contributed to the upbuilding of that institution where boys and girls are trained into useful citizenship—the home.

Mrs. Richards early saw that much of the love which leads people—fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters—to gather themselves together into homes, was

¹ No. 1, Publications of Ellen H. Richards Memorial Home Economics Fund. Price, 10 cents. Address: *American Home Economics Association, Roland Park, Baltimore, Md.* Other publications of the Fund: No. 2, *The First Home Economist—Xenophon*, 5 cents; No. 3, *An Early American Home Scientist—Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford*, 5 cents; No. 4, *Our First Home Economics Book—Catherine E. Beecher's Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 5 cents; No. 5, *Home Economics Day* (free). *The Journal of Home Economics* is published by the Association (\$2 per year). *Ellen H. Richards Calendar for 1913—50 cents*, postpaid.

This sketch of Mrs. Richards' life and work is issued for the celebration of "Home Economics Day," December 3, 1912. A program of suggestions for observing the day will be sent free on request; also information regarding the Home Economics Fund. Schools, Colleges, Clubs and other institutions and organizations are invited to observe Home Economics Day, and to share in the activities of the Fund. Address of Home Economics Fund Committee: Teachers College, New York City.

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being lost because of a lack of understanding of the material things which lie at the foundation of home life. She saw that people were spending their money for food which neither nourished the body well nor tended to produce strong muscles and clear brain; that home surroundings were not so healthful and beautiful as they might easily be made; and that hard-earned family incomes were being spent for that which gave little return in comfort and happiness. She determined, therefore, to secure for herself all available information on the subject of food, clothing, and houses in their relation to health and well-being and to give this information to others. This purpose was carried out through a life of nearly seventy years, at the expense of time, money, and strength, which might have been spent for her own selfish pleasure. She worked that others might be healthy, comfortable, and strong enough to do well their share of the world's work.

The first sixteen years of her life were passed upon the farm where she was born. There she obtained, partly from the country schools in the neighborhood, but chiefly from her parents, both of whom had been teachers, the elements of a general education. There too she was carefully trained by her mother, who was an excellent housekeeper, in all the household arts—cooking, sewing, and embroidery. At the age of thirteen she took a prize at a country fair for the best loaf of bread and another for an embroidered handkerchief. During her childhood too she learned to do many kinds of farm work. She drove the cattle back and forth from pasture, pitched hay, and made a garden.

When she was sixteen years old her parents moved from the farm to Westford, Massachusetts, in order that she might go to the academy there. During her life in Westford besides going to school she helped her mother with the housekeeping, and also, being free from the harder labor which farm life brings to women, found time to cultivate a love of flowers which remained with her to the end of her life. Even in her busiest years she found time to make a garden, to raise plants for the sick and to fill her home with flowers.

When she graduated from the academy, at the age of twenty, she wished to continue her education but at that time there was no college for women, either in New England or in

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the other eastern states. She was obliged, therefore, to content herself with reading. During this period she was helping her father in the country store and post-office of which he had charge, and it is said that she made this little store into a real circulating library, so anxious was she that others than herself should have the benefits of the books which she was reading. In 1865 a college for women had been founded at Poughkeepsie, New York, and named "Vassar Female College," a title which was later changed to Vassar College. Hearing of the opening of this school, Mrs. Richards began to save money and in September, 1868, she was able to enter upon a college course. She went to Vassar with money enough to carry her partly through one year. When this was exhausted she secured private pupils and paid her way through the rest of her course, which she was able to finish in two years because of the studying she had done by herself. While at college she came under the influence of the astronomer, Maria Mitchell, and became interested in exact science, and also under the influence of Professor C. H. Farrar, who was one of the first chemists in America to apply chemistry to everyday problems. When she graduated she was more anxious than ever to look deeper into the composition of the common things of life and to learn why they sometimes contribute to health and well-being and sometimes bring sickness. She wanted to pursue her scientific studies further but again she found that women were barred from higher education. While there were many schools in the country where men could secure a thorough scientific training, there was no such place for women. Finally, after much correspondence, she was, as a special favor and because of the good work that she had done at Vassar, admitted as a student to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. This was in January, 1871, a date which is important to remember because it marks the admission of the first woman into a strictly scientific school in America. Shortly after she entered the Institute of Technology one of her teachers was asked by the State Board of Health to examine the drinking waters of Massachusetts. It must be remembered that up to this time it had not been proved that water could carry sickness from one person to another. It was her privilege to help in the analysis of the drinking waters,

and as a result she became an expert water analyst. During her life she examined tens of thousands of samples of water to find out if there were dangerous substances in them. This was sometimes done for fees, but quite as often she did it without pay. When, for example, she lectured in a country town she always asked for a sample of the drinking water used at the school and took it back to Boston for analysis, requesting that other samples be sent to her from time to time for free analysis. A few years after she entered the Institute of Technology she became teacher there in Sanitary Chemistry, which is the study of water, air, food, and other common substances in their relations to health, and the men who were her students went forth to all parts of the earth. It is probable that through her own work in this line and through the students whom she educated she saved thousands of lives and prevented the crippling through disease of thousands more. For this one service we are glad to do her honor.

Mrs. Richards, as we have seen, had been admitted to the Institute of Technology as a special privilege. She was not content, however, that other women should be denied the chance to study which she had enjoyed. She, therefore, went to an organization known as "The Woman's Education Association," telling them that there was no place in Boston for girls to study science. As a result, these women raised enough money to equip a woman's laboratory in connection with the Institute of Technology. There Mrs. Richards taught for eight years, without pay, contributing also an average of a thousand dollars a year of her own earnings to its support. In 1878 girls were admitted to the Institute on the same terms as boys and in 1884 the woman's laboratory, no longer needed, was torn down. While she was teaching in this laboratory she watched over the young women students and took them from time to time into her home and allowed them to work for their board in order that they might continue their studies. The half which she did for the higher education of women in those early days, and later either alone or in connection with other college women, will never be known.

In 1875 she was married to Professor Robert H. Richards, head of the Mining Engineering Department of the Institute of Technology, and she established a home in one of the sub-

urbs of Boston which soon became not only a model of good housekeeping but a center of hospitality. There successive generations of students at the Institute of Technology, far from their homes and strangers in a big city, found welcome.

In 1876 Mrs. Richards became connected with the first society formed in America for teaching by letter. Her special department was the study of stones and minerals. But, in the course of the correspondence teaching which, being done before the days of stenography and the typewriter, was accomplished at great expense of time, and effort, she became impressed with the large amount of sickness among women and with the handicap which it laid upon them in all their undertakings. As a result she wrote a tract on "Health" which went into thousands of isolated country homes all over the country bearing a message of hope. She also started a sanitary science section in the correspondence society, which proved a great help to many women.

Up to the time that Mrs. Richards began her labors, cooking had been taught in various places but without any reference to the relation of food to health. Lunches had been served too in various schools but by persons who had little knowledge of the importance of proper nourishment. It was she who put the teaching of cooking on a scientific basis and showed the schools that they had a responsibility for the quality of the lunches served to their students. She was, therefore, the originator of the school lunch and domestic science movements. She personally directed one of the first important experiments in teaching cooking to children in one of the Boston public schools.

Up to the time she began her work the people in general had none of the information about the composition of food materials, which has now become almost as well recognized an element in general education as the three "Rs." It was she who made the first effort to bring this knowledge to the public. In connection with the exhibit of the State of Massachusetts at the World's Fair in Chicago in the year 1893, she maintained what was known as "The Rumford Kitchen." Here simple lunches were served daily, each lunch being accompanied by a card which told how much there was in the food which would make muscle, and how much which would keep the body warm

and give it energy with which to do work. It was she who first made popular the use of charts and models to show in a way easy to understand the composition of various foods.

By the year 1899 there were many teachers of cooking, sewing, and domestic science scattered over the country and Mrs. Richards began to think that much would be gained by bringing them together in a society in order that each might have the inspiration of the others and the benefit of their experiences. So she joined in founding what was known at first as "The Lake Placid Conference on Home Economics." This became in the year 1908 the American Home Economics Association, which brings together teachers of domestic science in colleges, secondary, and elementary schools, those who have charge of the food of the sick in hospitals, managers of lunch rooms, students, housekeepers and others interested in the improvement of home life. This organization at the time of her death numbered nearly 2,000 members, and had begun the publication of a periodical known as "The Journal of Home Economics." Even greater, however, though not so easily measured as the work which she did as organizer and president of this Association and as presiding officer at its meetings, was the inspiration which constantly went out from her office in Boston to teachers and workers in domestic science all over the country. It would be difficult to find any person connected with this movement, which has now grown to large proportions, who had not come either directly or indirectly under Mrs. Richards' influence. She guided, inspired, directed, and encouraged the home economics workers all over the world. No puzzling question or problem was too small or too large for her thoughtful consideration.

In related organizations, the National Education Association, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Health Association, and other societies, she tirelessly emphasized the application of science to the improvement of living. She produced our first books applying science to the home:—The Chemistry of Cooking and Cleaning, Food Materials and Their Adulteration, Air, Water and Food from a Sanitary Standpoint, The Cost of Living, The Cost of Food, The Cost of Cleanness, Euthenics, and many others. In scientific papers

and magazine articles, and on the lecture platform, she made known this new gospel of sanitary and economic science applied for right living.

In order to be able to accomplish so large an amount of work in the lecture room, in the laboratory, in correspondence, and in her own home, she systematized her labors in such a way as to save every moment. She once said "I wish I were triplets," but, being unable to carry out this wish, she tried to treble the amount of her available energy. Those who wish to be efficient in labor could hardly do better than to learn the details of her daily life and to find out how she contrived to save time for work which she considered important.

It is difficult to think of Mrs. Richards as dead for so much of the work which she started is still going on that it seems as if she must be still living and laboring. In the laboratories of many city health departments those who were her students are analyzing water in order to keep people from getting sick. In public and private schools women whom she helped and advised are teaching cooking and sewing and showing people how to keep well. Even in far off Japan one young woman whom she helped is teaching domestic science. The housekeepers are thinking more than they did about how to ventilate their houses and how to keep them clean and make them beautiful. Many poor girls too are able to go to college because she raised money to be used for this purpose.

Every year we are learning something new about the principles of health, and home making, and if she were living she would wish this knowledge to be given to everyone who needs it. For this reason money is now being raised to carry on her work by publishing books about healthful homes and by sending out teachers of domestic science to give lessons about food and clothing. This Home Economics Fund will carry forward permanently her service to health and home-betterment and fittingly will bear the name of Ellen H. Richards.

References: See *Life of Ellen H. Richards*, by Caroline L. Hunt, published by Whitcomb and Barrows, Boston (\$1.62, prepaid); *Journal of Home Economics* (Richards Memorial Number, October, 1911, 50 cents), Roland Park, Baltimore.

In Memoriam

ELLEN H. RICHARDS

A voice is hushed: but ere it failed,
The listening echoes caught its tone,
And now its message clear and keen
On every wind of heaven is blown.

A staff is broke: but ere it snapped,
Those who had leaned on it so long
Had made its steadfast fibre theirs,
And fare now forward, straight and strong.

A light is quenched: but ere it paled,
It lit a hundred torches' flame,
That shine across the darkening sky,
And star with gold one honored name.

April, 1911.

LAURA E. RICHARDS.