

1888.

McGill College, Montreal.

30TH APRIL.

THE ADDRESS OF THE FIRST CLASS
OF LADY GRADUATES AND THE
PRINCIPAL'S REPLY.

THE LADIES' VALEDICTORY.

The valedictory for the Donalda department was read by Octavia G. Ritchie, B. A., with grace and ease, and was received with cheers. She began by giving a short sketch of how ladies were first admitted to McGill and of their life since entering it. Five years ago very little was heard of a university course for women. At that time a few scholars in the High school were anxiously waiting for what the future would bring. Their brothers might go up to McGill, but they who were filled with the same longings for greater knowledge, were excluded from this course merely because they were girls. At that time the prize list was headed by a girl, and the same evening several of her classmates met to discuss the prospects for higher education and still remained sanguine in spite of the opposition of older heads. The college might be opened in the dim future, but not that year. Early in July the Principal was waited on to find out if there was any hope of the sacred portals being opened to women; he replied that it would hardly be that year. The names of eight candidates were sent in and two months of suspense were passed until in September the well-known endowment was given. To this generosity is due the graduating of the present class of women. It was in October, 1884, that the classes were first opened in the Peter Redpath museum, where the first delights of higher education were felt. Except in the honor courses the classes have been separate, and the greatest courtesy was always shown. The various clubs were mentioned, the Lawn Tennis, the Delta Sigma, the Converzazione and the Theodora Society. The

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important question of medical education for women was brought up, and the need of some provision insisted on. Medical women are needed at home, but it is the Eastern countries that are calling loudly. A lady missionary, with a thorough medical training, has a wonderful field before her. She alone can gain admission to her suffering sisters, and it is often by her power to heal their physical infirmities that she first has an opportunity to enlighten the darkness of their souls. A medical course should be provided for the women of this city and province, and some time it must be done. The question is when. The gentlemen students were thanked for their kindly feeling and courteous behaviour. While there is a spirit of rivalry, it is a frank and generous feeling. The ladies also were loyal to their country and university, and grateful to the professors for their kindness and patience, and they, too, go out from their Alma Mater with heavy hearts, bidding her farewell.

At the close of her address Miss Ritchie was presented with a bouquet by the gentlemen students.

SIR WM. DAWSON'S REPLY.

Sir Wm. Dawson replied as follows: Ladies,—I beg to acknowledge on behalf of the university the address which you have been so kind as to present and which reflects credit both on you and on us. I cannot better congratulate you on the proud historical position which you occupy to-day, as the first graduating class of women in this university, than by referring to the circumstances which you recall to memory in connection with the opening of the Donalds Special course. While it has been the policy of this university to husband its resources for the essentials of its work, and to avoid new and untried experiments, it has always been prompt to respond to any true educational want, and hence it has often been in advance of other universities of this Dominion, and perhaps in some sense in advance of the time, in entering on and cultivating new fields. I may refer in this connection to the early development of its medical and law schools, its faculty of applied science, its affiliation of theological colleges, and its examinations for associate in arts, the latter of which have directly led to the institution of our classes for women. When, four years ago, the representatives of this class called on me with

reference to admission to the Faculty of arts, I was already in a position to say that the regulations of the university recognized the right of women to take the examinations for senior associate in arts, and, therefore, that if a sufficient class should offer and means could be found for its tuition, there could be no difficulty in the matter, in so far as preparation for the intermediate examination was concerned. When it was ascertained that eight young women, who had taken certificates as associates in arts, were prepared to enter, I considered the first condition to be met. But the second was one of greater difficulty, more especially as it was evident that if anything was to be done, it should be done well, and in a manner creditable to the university and likely to be permanent. In addition, therefore, to leading gentlemen in McGill, I consulted with the ladies who had been most influential in the Ladies' Educational association, and with my friend, Canon Norman, the vice-chancellor of Bishop's college, who had been acting with us on behalf of that university in the examinations of women as senior associates, and who, as chairman of the Commissioners of Schools, was interested in the High school pupils. The pressure incident to the preparations for the British association in the autumn of 1884, and the absence from town of leading members of the university, caused however some inevitable delay in giving the matter a definite form. But just at this time, and while the meeting of the association was in progress, I was one day called out of the geological section by Sir Donald Smith, who had come to intimate his intended gift of \$50,000 in aid of the higher education of women. No gift could have been more opportune, and in so far as I was concerned it was unsolicited. It placed us in a position at once to make arrangements for the classes, but in order to commence these in time for the expectant candidates, and to prevent them from losing a session, the details of the work of the first year had to be extemporized, and class rooms borrowed from the museum, in advance even of the formal deed of gift by which the endowment was transferred to the university. The eminent success which has attended the enterprise, and which I confess has been beyond my expectations, is the best justification of the prompt action of the university, and of the enlightened liberality of our benefactor in his original gift, and in the en-

largement of it to \$120,000, in order to allow the continuance of the classes to the fourth year, as well as in that farther enlargement which he is understood to contemplate, and and which will give us, in affiliation to the university, a college for women equal to those great institutions of the United States which we have hitherto regarded with envy; and indeed superior to them in the advantages to be derived from immediate association with a great university. When you entered the first year you could scarcely have anticipated what was before you, and it is pleasant to know that you are satisfied with what you have attained. You feel also that the position which you have now reached, while it affords ground for congratulation, carries with it also the obligation to use for good and high purposes the training you have received. Many will, no doubt, ask with some degree of scepticism in what respects college graduates are superior to other young ladies, but I trust that, with God's blessing, you will show in your future lives the benefits of the culture received here, and that you will be followed by many worthy successors, as good students as this class, I cannot wish for better. You speak of professional work. Some important professions are already open to you here and elsewhere. The question as to others, and as to opportunities here, is like that for education in arts, one of demand and supply. In conclusion, it is a matter of thankfulness that no injury to health has manifested itself in our women's classes, and that we have good evidence in the examinations just completed that the students in the junior years are likely to emulate your good example, and to attain to equally satisfactory standing. I do not think that it is necessary or indeed desirable to keep up any feeling of rivalry between the sexes in college work. We are satisfied to know, as the result of our four years' experience, that the work of the faculty of arts, as at present arranged, seems equally adapted to both, inasmuch as the honors and standing attained are pretty equally divided. It will be for the future, and when greater means are available, to decide what improvements or refinements, if any, in the interest of one or the other sex may be desirable. I need not say to you that we shall always take a special interest in our first graduating class of women, and that you leave us now with our sincere good wishes.

Keep these
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