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Educating Daughters: The Christchurch Girls

The next two chapters explore the extent to which four professional families (two in Christchurch, two in Melbourne) provided childhood environments for their daughters that embraced the objectives of the women's movement for educational equality and the broadening of opportunities for young women. University degrees and the pursuit of careers became central to conceptions of the 'New Woman' that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The family studies are presented in an order that proceeds from an uncompromising endorsement of the 'new', through purposeful commitment to change, to a hesitancy about discarding traditional attitudes to women's place in society. The location and style in which the girls were educated—whether, more traditionally, within the home by parents and governesses, or at private schools and later at university—may have varied, yet the precise mix of ideas, circumstance and family dynamics at work within each example can nonetheless be shown to rest upon a common desire to provide an education for girls that cast aside 'mere accomplishments'. The two New Zealand families (the Macmillan Browns and the Wildings) are the frontrunners and the Melbourne families (the Leepers and the Massons) the comparative laggards. Whether this was in part indicative of significant differences in the social contexts of Melbourne and Christchurch is a matter pursued elsewhere.¹ At this point, it is perhaps sufficient to observe

1 Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies*, pp. 95, 105–6.

that those at the forefront of the push for change in Christchurch believed themselves to occupy a time and place of special opportunity, and that historians subsequently have endorsed this sense of historical moment. The following chapter on the Christchurch girls makes considerable use of the relatively rich primary sources available to reveal the intense nature of the mother–daughter relationships that develop within each family.

The Macmillan Brown Girls: A prison of expectations?

Millicent and Viola Macmillan Brown spent most of their childhood and young adulthood within the comparatively sheltered environment of the family home. Theirs was an upbringing shot through with apparent contradictions. Despite both of her parents being prominent figures in New Zealand's public education system, Millicent did not attend a school until she was 12, and then only briefly, and Viola's education occurred similarly, for the most part, within the confines of the family.² Although both John and Helen Macmillan Brown endorsed the image of the strong, independent career woman, they proved in some ways to be overprotective parents. Furthermore, while a school-based education for girls was regarded by many as progressive, the Macmillan Browns favoured a sheltered home-based education for their daughters, isolated from the pressure of competition with their peers. Parenthood allowed the couple to put their beliefs about the desirability of individual tuition and relative freedom in early childhood into practice. Public examinations at the culmination of Millicent and Viola's education would test the success of their educational theories.

The site of this educational experiment, the Macmillan Browns' family home, Holmbank, was a relatively plainly designed eight-roomed wooden structure, set within five acres of garden, and woodland running down to a stream and boathouse. Rustic in appearance, the property contained cows, hens, pigs and horses,

2 According to New Zealand census figures, in 1881 4,143 girls were taught at home, out of a total population of 62,356 girls aged 5 to 15. The corresponding figures for 1896 are 3,596 out of 84,881. See 'Attendance at Schools—Increase 1871–1896 and Proportion to Population (5–15) Years', Table VIII, *Census, April 1896—Education of the People*, p. 268.

as well as a large vegetable garden and a small dairy. The interior of the house, more functional and comfortable than fashionable in style, presented a cultured appearance, with books spilling out of John Macmillan Brown's library to line the walls of the staircase and hallway, paintings of Italian scenes adorning the walls and ceramic tiles depicting Shakespearian plays framing a fireplace.³ The running of the household and property was in the hands of at least two live-in servants: a general domestic/cook and a nursemaid or governess as the age of the children dictated, and a gardener and odd-jobs man who came to the house daily.⁴

As the previous chapter suggests, any assessment of the education of the Macmillan Brown daughters needs to acknowledge the unique features of their parents' marriage and the process of idealisation, which had already begun to attach itself to Helen Connon before her children were born. John Macmillan Brown was plainly the dominant influence in Helen Connon's rise to academic prominence. He personally smoothed the way for her admission to university study, nurtured the university career that culminated in her becoming the first woman to earn an MA with first-class honours in the British Empire, assisted her passage to the principalship at Christchurch Girls' High School and championed her as a reforming headmistress. Indeed, it could be said that the idealisation of Helen Connon as a path breaker owes much to his persistent advocacy. Inevitably, their marriage was celebrated as embodying the new ideal—a professional, working couple. The template for the education of Millicent and Viola had been fashioned. They would be raised in the image of their mother. University degrees beckoned from the day they were born.

It would be possible to see in the Macmillan Brown household a replication of the family life pattern prevalent within the upper-middle-class British society.⁵ As a professional couple, neither Helen nor John involved themselves in the domestic labour of the family home. John worked at his hobby of gardening for an hour every

3 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 47–48; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 181; Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 16–17; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 60–61.

4 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 16–17, 24; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 180–82; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 61; 'Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown from 8 Jan. 1888 [to 6 September 1889]', JMBP, A11/13.

5 Gathorne-Hardy, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny*, pp. 64–70; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 65–66, 84.

morning before work; Helen supervised her servants and, while her early childhood experiences equipped her with domestic skills, she rarely worked alongside them. In her *Memoirs*, Millicent remembers the novelty of her mother once mowing the lawn and watching her on another occasion as she skimmed cream off milk in the dairy.⁶ Difficulties in finding servants, as in 1902 after the family returned from a two-year period in Europe, left mother and daughter no option but to run the household themselves at times.⁷ For the most part, however, the Macmillan Browns' daily domestic needs were taken care of by others. Millicent could thus justly claim later that she did nothing for herself while growing up.⁸ Such an environment involved a considerable degree of separation of children from parents in their daily lives. In this it bore some resemblance to domestic practices prevalent within upper middle-class British society.⁹ Equally, it may be seen as reflecting the intensity of both parents' academic careers, set out in the previous chapter, which ensured that there was no separation of work and home. Holmbank was a place of work and study, and this was to have significant consequences for the functioning of the household and the childhood of Millicent and Viola.

Nothing captures the philosophy upon which the academic reproduction of their daughters was based better than Grossmann's recollection of a conversation with Helen Connon, before she was married, on the place of accomplishments in a young girl's education:

She once said to me with girlish warmth that she thought it vulgar and foolish for girls to learn accomplishments when they had only a miserable stock of general knowledge; it was like putting on jewellery over a ragged dress. Scholarship came first with her; the knowledge of languages, science, history, mathematics, and the rest might follow.¹⁰

6 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 186; Viola Helen Notariello's introduction to Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p.xxvi; Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 17.

7 Mrs Robert Craig to 'My Dear Sister' (Helen Macmillan Brown), 8 May 1902, JMBP, A19/7; Pata to Helen Macmillan Brown, 25 April [1902], JMBP, A19/10. On problems finding servants in New Zealand, see, for example, Charlotte Macdonald, 'Strangers at the Hearth: The Eclipse of Domestic Service in New Zealand Homes c 1830s–1940s', in Barbara Brookes (ed.), *At Home in New Zealand: History, Houses, People*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2000, pp. 41–56.

8 Lovell-Smith interview with Patricia Lawson, 5 March 2001, Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 84.

9 Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 65–66, 84. Millicent and Viola Macmillan Brown did not have their meals with their parents.

10 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, p. 35.

The danger that this firmly held and rigorously pursued educational philosophy might become a 'prison of expectations' within the family setting was an obvious and real one.¹¹ John Macmillan Brown's views on the role of the family in education are set out in *Modern Education* (1908). He describes the 'colonial family' as 'a helpless ship' that was 'often lax and unorganised' and as having a deleterious effect upon the 'character and career' of the nation's children. The home, he believed, needed to be 're-organise[d]' on a 'more deliberate and intelligent basis'.¹² The childhoods constructed at Holmbank for Millicent and Viola provided exemplars of the dictum. During the day the household operated as something of a microcosm of a girls' school, supervised by the principal/mother, and staffed by a governess and other educational experts as required. Until John Macmillan Brown returned from his 16-hour days at Canterbury College, it was also a female sanctuary.¹³ As we shall see, however, his educational views provided the overarching framework within which the childhoods of Millicent and Viola unfolded.

The dominating presence of John Macmillan Brown at Holmbank is best illustrated by the regular Sunday morning breakfasts that he hosted for male students. Less social occasions than a further teaching and mentoring opportunity, which he saw as his duty to provide, they often developed into intense academic and philosophical discussions. Indeed, Sundays typically brought a steady stream of visitors to Holmbank, mainly Macmillan Brown's friends, fellow educationalists and men at the forefront of public and civic affairs.¹⁴ At these times, his energetic and egocentric personality dominated all others, and the contrast of father and mother in the household was at its sharpest. In the introduction to her father's *Memoirs* (1974), Millicent described the gatherings as 'rather a strain'.¹⁵ Whatever impact these comings and goings and the associated discussion had upon the young Millicent and Viola at the time and later, they stand as a reminder of where the controlling influence lay at Holmbank.

11 The phrase 'prison of expectations' comes from Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations*.

12 Macmillan Brown, *Modern Education*, pp. 8–9.

13 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 112.

14 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 183–84; Viola Helen Notariello's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

15 Millicent Baxter's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, pp. xviii–xix.

For the first six years of Millicent Macmillan Brown's life, both parents were largely absent from the home during the day, and she was left in the care and instruction of others. Yet they retained complete intellectual control of her upbringing, designing a program for her that they left others to implement. Millicent was born on 8 January 1888, during the Christchurch Girls' High School summer break. Three weeks later her mother Helen resumed her full-time position as principal of the school, a post she retained until 1894.¹⁶ Our knowledge of the childcare arrangements for Millicent's infancy rests upon a single diary of uncertain authorship, which records the first 20 months of her life.¹⁷ Close scrutiny of the handwriting, however, suggests that it was most likely Helen who kept the diary, and that in doing so she employed the third person as a literary device, so as to provide a more scientific tone to her observations.¹⁸ Whoever the diarist was, the entries are plainly the work of a person of intelligence and literary ability, well versed in the developmental stages of infancy. It is abundantly clear from the diary that the overall control of Millicent's care was not relinquished by her parents to the nursing staff to whom she was entrusted; Helen remained firmly and actively in the director's seat. Indeed, in the supervision of her daughter's infant care, as inferred by her biographers, she seems to have adopted the same thoroughness and insistence upon 'absolute control' that she demanded as principal of Christchurch Girls' High School.¹⁹

The diary entries reflect the trend towards the scientific observation of infants and children stimulated by the example of evolutionist Charles Darwin and educationalists in nineteenth-century Britain and

16 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 16. Edith Grossmann claims that Millicent was named after a philosophic journal that her parents were reading in the period before her birth, Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, p. 48.

17 'Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown', JMBP.

18 Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 63–64, concluded that neither Helen nor her sister Maria Connon, who was living at Holmbank at the time, could have written the diary as they were both referred to in the third person and were largely absent from the household during weekdays. Yet the handwriting seems to be that of Helen Macmillan Brown, and the diary entries at times bear the tone of a second-hand witness reporting on the events of the day. For example the entry for 20 February 1888: [Millicent] 'Is reported to have smiled a great deal today & to have clapped her hands.'

19 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 38, 48–50; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 53, 66, 88–91.

Europe.²⁰ Though mainly brief, irregular and often retrospective, they record Millicent's physical, intellectual and social development and offer glimpses of the intensity of the interaction between Helen and individual caregivers. Millicent's physical care is left to her nurse. Helen is said to have bathed her once.²¹ John Macmillan Brown emerges as a rather impatient father, who was irritated by the practical details of infant care and shielded from it as much as possible: 'the baby's father was rather annoyed at being kept a very few minutes outside Stranges whilst three bonnets were being selected to be sent home for the baby's approval';²² 'her father has gone to the Senate today & we are going to try to do a great deal of Baby's sewing when he is away'.²³

The involvement of both parents becomes increasingly apparent in entries that deal with the more explicitly cerebral aspects of Millicent's infant development.

Baby has been progressing satisfactorily during the last few days—she says 'Agu' very often now. Five days ago we played the piano to see how it affected her—its effect was most marked—she smiled & went on cooing to herself nearly all the time & a melancholy air made her melancholy—the same thing has happened every time we tried her ...

Baby for a long time has known nearly everything said to her.—For the last six weeks she has been able to say rhymes repeating them after they are said to her, for last two months has been able to say her letters after us.²⁴

As Millicent moves into her second year and her motor and verbal skills develop, so her engagement with her father increases: 'She now for the last two months runs out of the library when her dada comes home from "leckshure" & helps him to take off his "coatee" then she pulls off his boots tugging at the tags & expecting the "tockings"

20 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 43; Paul Mussen, John Conger and Jerome Kagan, *Child Development and Personality*, 4th edn, Harper Row Publishers, New York, 1974, p. 4; Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Diary: The Early Years of My Daughter Marianne (1835–38)*, Clement Shorter, London, 1923; Harriet Blodgett (ed.), *The Englishwoman's Diary: An Anthology*, Fourth Estate, London, 1992, pp. 315–16; Alison MacKinnon, *The New Women: Adelaide's Early Women Graduates*, Wakefield Press, Netley, South Adelaide, 1986, pp. 99–113; Selleck, *Finding Home*, p. 11.

21 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 18 February 1888.

22 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 18 February 1888; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 63–64.

23 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 29 February 1888.

24 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 29 February 1888, 6 September 1888.

to come off too.’²⁵ Significantly, the last entry in the diary provides an assessment of Millicent’s intellectual development and indicates increasing parental scrutiny:

During her second year she has not been so placid as in her 1st year. She has developed great liveliness and restlessness but she has always been very good ... She speaks most articulately—the only sound she avoids are f & v & r at the beginning of words though she does not mind f & v in the middle of words—too she does not care for though she uses it sometimes ... She has never had any childish ailments & is very strong & healthy—she is very fair with a very delicate though healthy complexion ... she is still out nearly all day & generally has two sleeps a day inside in her perambulator. Her food at present is Nestle milk & bread, sago, porridge ... She is very fond of having ‘penkill’ (pencil) & of ‘yiting’ (writing) ...²⁶

Millicent had passed from infancy to childhood and her care now moved even more firmly into the hands of her parents. From this point, we must reconstruct her childhood from more disparate sources. The dominant voice in the surviving testimony, as it is for the family history more generally, is John Macmillan Brown. As a public intellectual at the forefront of educational debate, his views of education shaped the form and substance of Millicent and later Viola’s education. To balance his accounts, we rely upon fragments of family correspondence and the published reminiscences of family and friends. In sum, these sources provide some assessment of what may be seen as an attempt to put a set of educational precepts into practice. With these caveats in mind, we can identify three major stages in Millicent’s educational development: from infancy until the age of eight; a second phase that ends with the death of her mother in 1903, when Millicent was 15 years of age; and a final phase that is dominated by preparation for university study.

In the first of these stages, marking the passage from infancy to childhood, we see the Macmillan Browns give full rein to their educational idealism. It was a time of free or semi-directed play in the home environment, in which formal teaching was minimised and adult involvement confined to the superintending of activities that fired the imagination. The key to success in education during this early phase

25 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 6 September 1888.

26 Diary of Millicent Amiel Brown, 6 September 1888.

was, in Macmillan Brown's view, 'ever-changing variety' and 'never-failing cheerfulness'. This methodology included providing suitable toys, stimulating manual dexterity by encouraging the cutting of paper patterns, and promoting physical activities, such as skipping and dance to develop rhythm and balance. The greatest adult involvement, and clearly the most valued by the Macmillan Browns, was the reading of imaginative stories to Millicent. It was in this area that John Macmillan Brown made his most significant contribution to Millicent's childhood. He was to read her traditional children's stories, 'especially fairy stories', and invented his own fantastic tales, believing the use of the imagination to be critical to the mental and moral development of the young.²⁷ In Millicent, he found a responsive listener and mimic: 'I used to tell stories to myself all the time.'²⁸

The idealised childhood that the Macmillan Browns sought to provide for Millicent depended ultimately upon their ability to arrange and oversee the daily care they entrusted to others. It also depended upon the availability of highly educated governesses.²⁹ In this, as in much else, the Macmillan Browns reveal attitudes to the family and to children that were a mixture of traditional and modern. They saw the family and the home (in its ideal state) as providing the most secure and desirable environment for the nurturing of the young and chose not to enrol Millicent in kindergartens available in the city.³⁰ They also accepted that the care and early development of the very young was best provided by women. As John Macmillan Brown put it, women possessed a 'rich equipment of emotions and instincts' that sensitised them to the needs of children.³¹ And when the Macmillan Browns sought caregivers for Millicent, they drew upon the small group of young women endeavouring to make their way through to university. Helen had taught them at Christchurch Girls' High School and had

27 Macmillan Brown, *Modern Education*, pp. 24, 23–28; Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 48–50.

28 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 18; Violet Helen Notariello's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

29 According to Coral Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies*, p. 73, one in six women teaching in New Zealand in 1891 was a governess.

30 The Macmillan Brown's educational philosophy was influenced in part by Rousseau's romantic idea of the child and the need for a secluded 'playground for children beyond the reach of the adult world', and Friedrich Fröbel's Kindergarten system. They shared the developing nineteenth-century respect for the individuality and the spontaneity of the child. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 29, 39–42, 86–87, 91–92.

31 Macmillan Brown, *Modern Education*, p. 23.

involved herself closely in easing their passage into higher education. Janet Prosser, who became Millicent's governess in 1894, was taught by Helen from 1882 and won a junior university scholarship in 1888. Gertrude Boulton, whom Helen first knew as a neighbour in Avonside, was another former pupil and university student to act as governess at Holmbank. When the Macmillan Browns visited England and Europe in 1892, it was Helen's sister, Maria Connon, a 23-year-old Canterbury College student, who ran the household, took responsibility for Millicent's development and organised tutors in areas where she felt her training was inadequate. Maria's education had been closely moulded by Helen, and it is difficult to imagine that Millicent would have noticed any change in the routines and practices that prevailed at Holmbank. Organised spontaneity was in the hands of a family of professionals determined to provide the ideal childhood.

In 1894, 37-year-old Helen Connon retired from Christchurch Girls' High School, plagued by chronic insomnia. Did she become the headmistress of the household? There can be no doubt that her greater presence in the home coincides with a major shift in Millicent's childhood experience. Six years of age and judged by her parents as being ready for more formal lessons, her day now made room for the inculcation of routines expected to carry through to adulthood. It began with an early morning walk with her mother and was followed by two hours of tuition from Helen in French, spelling, Latin and, initially, music. A governess, Janet Prosser, taught her 'other subjects', including science.³² Thoughts of sending Millicent to school had been rejected. In her mother's professional opinion two hours concentrated time at home with her was the equivalent of five in a classroom.³³ It is difficult to judge the nature of this mother-teacher-daughter education. Lovell-Smith suggests that Helen was more of a teacher than a mother to her daughters. Millicent and Viola later remarked upon the rather remote and intellectual persona of their mother during their childhoods. At the time, the situation would perhaps have appeared normal to them, for their sheltered upbringing provided few glimpses of alternative modes of mothering. Helen's pedagogical opposition to rote learning and preference for encouraging independent thought

32 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 24; Millicent Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown ('Dear Daddie'), 7 July 1899, JMBP, A2/36.

33 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 24; Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 36, 50–52.

in children seems to have struck a responsive chord with Millicent.³⁴ Moreover, she took pains to ensure that after the intensity of the morning's lessons, those in the afternoon were less strenuous and devoted to subjects thought less demanding. Foremost among them were the reading of good literature, art and crafts, and music.

As a first and, until she was nine years of age, only child, Millicent's early life passed amongst adults. It was often a solitary one. As educationalists, both parents were aware of her need for interaction with children of a similar age, and they took steps to provide opportunities that would stimulate her social development. To encourage Millicent to enjoy the outdoors within the rambling five acres of Holmbank, they invited the children of university and teaching colleagues to their home in the hope that they might 'be her playmates'.³⁵ In 1893, for example, when Millicent was five years of age, the Dendy girls, Vera and Margaret, the daughters of a newly appointed biology lecturer at Canterbury College, became her first close friends. Their arrival stands out like a beacon in the life of a lonely young girl. Millicent, later to describe it as 'the great event of my childhood', led the two younger girls into 'endless scrapes', careering around gardens naked, clambering in the same state into 'a greenhouse tank' and climbing trees, 'including the forbidden one over the ... river'.³⁶ Helen encouraged the friendships by taking the girls to the seaside at New Brighton, where they could paddle in the sea, and treated them to currant buns.³⁷

As a day out for the girls, these excursions underline the domestic, female and sheltered context of Millicent's childhood. The addition of Robin Bevan-Brown, the son of Christchurch Boys' High's headmaster, to the play group did little if anything to alter the nature of Millicent's interaction with other children. As Millicent acknowledges in her *Memoirs*, she was the 'dominating' force within the group of

34 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 14 November 1900, JMBP, A3/91; Millicent Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 17 November 1900, JMBP, A3/90; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 48–51.

35 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 190.

36 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 18–19; Brian J. Smith, 'Dendy, Arthur (1865–1925)', *ADB*, vol. 8, 1981, pp. 279–80. Arthur Dendy was a Manchester-born and educated zoologist, who took up an appointment as demonstrator and assistant lecturer in Biology at the University of Melbourne in 1888. In 1893 he moved to New Zealand with his wife and children where he was professor of Biology at Canterbury College, Christchurch, until 1903. The Dendy family lived in the Cashmere Hills above Christchurch where the Macmillan Browns also had a cottage.

37 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 19–20.

young friends. This was largely a reflection of her greater age, but there may have been an unconscious tendency for her to assume, in her own little world, the controlling persona of her parents and become a veritable headmistress of the playground. Moreover, the deliberateness with which the Macmillan Browns pursued their educational ideals—whether in school, university or within their own family—left little time for engagement in the more popular community activities that might have provided Millicent with a greater range of social interaction with others. Team games were shunned in favour of less competitive physical activities like walking which were able to be experienced individually or as a family group and were capable of being combined with explorations of the natural environment. The emphasis throughout was on providing a sheltered and mentally stimulating domestic setting, in which the seeds of future academic success could be sown.

The second phase of Millicent's education can be seen as coinciding with her father's retirement from Canterbury College in March 1896, as he struggled with eye-strain and was troubled by insomnia. Thereafter, John Macmillan Brown became an increasingly peripatetic scholar, public intellectual and prolific author. The change of circumstance was to put considerable pressure upon the parents' desire to continue to educate Millicent themselves and led to Millicent's first experiences of formal schooling outside the family home. It took place not in New Zealand, but in Britain, on the Continent and later in Australia and came with a degree of parental reluctance. The nine months that followed Macmillan Brown's retirement were spent by the family in Britain and Europe, and throughout this time Millicent's educational regime was a more relaxed one. Concentrated sessions with her mother were rarer, much time was devoted to family activities and learning occasions were limited to those associated with visiting historic buildings and places. While Macmillan Brown's suggestion that he intended to 'cultivate idleness' on the trip 'Home' was a flippant one, this period of Millicent's childhood stands out as one in which there was as much fun as work.³⁸ The trio learnt to cycle, spent time picnicking, walking, hiking, and visiting friends and family.³⁹

38 'Canterbury College Farewell to Professor Brown', *Lyttelton Times*, 16 March 1896, p. 2.

39 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 60–68; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 189–94; Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 21–23; Millicent Baxter's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, pp. xvi–xviii.

Four years passed before Millicent, now 12 years of age, attended a school. The family had grown in November 1897 with the birth of Viola, and in early 1900 all four, accompanied by governess Gertrude Boulton, set off again for Europe, principally to seek treatment for John Macmillan Brown at a Wiesbaden eye clinic. After settling their daughters in a London boarding house near Crystal Palace, Helen and John Macmillan Brown embarked upon a European tour late in May 1900. During their absence for some four months, Millicent attended a girls' day school, the pedigree of which had been carefully vetted and was run by a sister of an academic colleague, A. P. W. Thomas, Professor of Biology at the University of Auckland.⁴⁰ A further period of formal schooling occurred while her father underwent treatment at Wiesbaden, and Millicent, her mother, sister and governess lived at a boarding establishment in Montreux near Lake Geneva. The original intention was that the stay at Montreux should be devoted to an immersion in the French language. With characteristic thoroughness, Helen Macmillan Brown sought out a suitable woman to provide private tuition for them all at their apartment. To encourage her daughters' listening skills, she took them to church (the Eglise Libre) to hear the sermons delivered in French. Indeed, it was primarily as part of this quest for immersion in French language and culture that Millicent was enrolled in a local high school for girls.⁴¹

The letters that passed on an almost daily basis between John and Helen Macmillan Brown during this period reveal the closeness with which she monitored Millicent's schooling.⁴² Helen wrote that the 'fees are wonderfully low, because I suppose it is a State affair—they

40 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, p. 194; Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 27; Keith Sinclair, *A History of the University of Auckland, 1883–1983*, University of Auckland/Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1983, p. 22. The school that Millicent attended in London was part of the Girls' High School Day Company group. Before the trip, Helen considered sending Millicent to Cheltenham Girls' School, but thought better of it after studying the school prospectus and receiving a report from friends who had visited the school on her behalf. Helen judged the school's atmosphere to be too religious and not relaxed enough for Millicent. (Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 6 June 1899, JMBP, A2/6.) Millicent writes that up until this point her 'education, by conventional standards, had been very spotty. For English, history, geography I was in the class normal for my years. For arithmetic and French, in both of which I was poor, I went down a class. For Latin I went up amongst girls of fifteen and sixteen who seemed to me practically grown up.' Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 26.

41 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown: 5 November 1900, JMBP, A3/67; 6 November 1900, JMBP, A3/87; 18 November 1900, JMBP, A3/89; 25 November 1900, JMBP, A3/66; 2 December 1900, JMBP, A3/89; 11 December 1900, JMBP, A3/30.

42 Between approximately 4 November 1900 and 20 December 1900.

are only 15 francs a quarter & 10 francs entry fee for the first term'. She approved the manner in which the school, with its 11 masters and 6 mistresses and only 130 pupils, maintained a desirably small class size. Nonetheless, before enrolling her daughter, she interviewed the school's director and Millicent's prospective teacher. She specified the hours Millicent would attend and took full advantage of the degree of individual choice the school allowed in the subjects to be studied, deciding that her daughter would 'take all—except religion & sewing & singing'. She paid particular attention to the learning environment that the school provided, praising its 'beautiful corridors and large well ventilated rooms' and noted that the children's individual desks could be 'lowered or raised to suit the pupils'. Above all else she was attracted by a level of state and municipal involvement that encouraged greater female participation in education by maintaining low fees.⁴³

The monitoring of Millicent's schooling at Montreux was as persistent as it was insistent. The novelty of the situation required adjustment and was stressful for mother and daughter. Millicent was at first reluctant to go to school: she 'says she would not mind so much if I would not insist on her wearing her spectacles at school—perhaps if she wears them at home reading that would be enough for they are no good to her when looking at the blackboard'.⁴⁴ And Helen soon began to revise her first assessment: 'In spite of their splendid building, &c I don't think the school is as good as it might be.'⁴⁵ At the heart of her concerns was a pedagogical opposition to rote learning:

Her mistress seems to be very old fashioned and nearly all the lessons are supposed to be learned by heart ... Geography, History, Reading—they say it to her in turn on the platform while the rest look on or play. I told Millicent she need not do more than read the lessons over carefully & tell the mistress she would write an account in her own words of the lesson set. I don't think more could be expected of her than that. But what a stupid way to teach.⁴⁶

Convinced that Millicent was 'just wasting her time learning nothing' and that the director was not 'of much account' and unaware of what was 'going on', Helen kept Millicent at home for three days

43 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 6 November 1900, JMBP, A3/87.

44 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 5 November 1900, JMBP, A3/67.

45 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 14 November 1900, JMBP, A3/91.

46 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 14 November 1900, JMBP, A3/91.

and threatened to remove her from the school until she was put into a higher class with less rote learning. (Millicent was also evidently pale, tired and unable to eat breakfast before going off to school each day).⁴⁷ That the incident loomed large in the concerns of mother and daughter is evident in a letter from Millicent to her father:

On Monday I shall go to a higher class. Mummie went to the Director and he said there would be less learning by heart and he said also that the Mistress was very nice. There will be a master for Geographie so I will not always hear the same voice.⁴⁸

The change of class was accompanied by even greater parental intervention. Millicent would in future have just 12 to 14 hours of lessons per week and would cease arithmetic. Thereafter each day, Helen would proceed to the school carrying with her 'the remainder of [Millicent's] breakfast ... & some biscuits & chocolate drinks' for refreshment, and mother and daughter would take 'an hour's walk up the hills'. The changes appear broadly to satisfy both mother and daughter. There 'seem[ed] to be no rote learning' and while there was 'still room for improvement', Helen was satisfied with Millicent's general physical well-being.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, she continued to make her presence felt at the school, insisting, for example, that her daughter's desk be moved closer to the teacher.⁵⁰

Helen's attentive mothering was infused with a determination to provide her daughter with opportunities that would enable her to realise the desired feminine ideal. It placed considerable importance upon health and fitness and achieving a proper balance between them and academic studies. In Millicent's case, these concerns took on an anxiousness associated with the fact that, at the time of the trip to Europe, she was on the cusp of adolescence and Helen's own health was compromised by chronic insomnia and several miscarriages. Indeed, Helen plainly thought that her daughter was neither physically nor mentally robust and needed 'a great deal of looking after'.⁵¹ She encouraged her with 'little presents' and constantly urged

47 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown: 17 November 1900, JMBP, A3/88; 22 November 1900, JMBP, A3/91; 19 December 1900, JMBP, A3/92.

48 Millicent Macmillan Brown to Macmillan Brown, 17 November 1900, JMBP, A3/88.

49 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 20 November 1900, JMBP, A3/14.

50 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, 19 November 1900, JMBP, A3/92.

51 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown: 8 December 1900, JMBP, A3/24; 25 November 1900, JMBP, A3/66.

that she conserve her energy. On one occasion, believing her daughter to be particularly tired after gym class, she insisted there be less arm swinging, though Millicent took no notice.⁵² Each day she would accompany Millicent to school for her first class at 8.00 am, take her for a walk an hour later (during arithmetic class) and return in the afternoon to take another walk, after history and before a French literature class beginning at 4.30 pm. On another occasion she rebuffed Millicent's desire 'to go to more classes', because 'she must have plenty of time to walk, especially when the bright weather comes'.⁵³

Health, exercise and education remained the dominant concerns of the time at Montreux. Few distractions were permitted. Sightseeing and entertainments, such as musical concerts, were rarely permitted to disrupt the family routine; they were judged to be luxuries and expenditure upon them was dispensed frugally. There was little time within this essentially spartan regimen for social engagements outside the family group; attempts to keep abreast of the issues of the day and visits to the *Kursaal* to read the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* were abandoned.⁵⁴

The return to Christchurch and to the routines of Holmbank, in January 1902, were to be severely challenged by problems held by contemporaries to be part of colonial circumstance. Edith Grossmann argued that, in contrast to the New Zealand situation, in 'an old country a married woman may more easily continue in her profession, and everywhere it is possible for those who are childless, or for those who have such excellent servants and other agents that they can confine themselves to supervising'.⁵⁵ Whatever the argument's general applicability, the reality at Holmbank when the Macmillan Browns returned was that domestic help was hard to find and Millicent and her mother had no choice but to step into the breach. After briefly considering sending her daughter to Christchurch Girls' High School, Helen resolutely persisted with lessons at Holmbank. Millicent seems to have enjoyed the novel experience of housework, but her

52 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown: 29 November 1900, JMBP, A3/3; 30 November 1900, JMBP, A3/4.

53 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown, [6] December 1900, JMBP, A3/21.

54 Helen Macmillan Brown to John Macmillan Brown: 19 November 1900, JMBP, A3/13; 22 November 1900, JMBP, A3/11; 25 November 1900, JMBP, A3/66; 13 December 1900, JMBP, A3/36; 14 December 1900, JMBP, A3/38; 16 December 1900, JMBP, A3/42.

55 Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 53–54.

mother's anxieties about its impact on the more serious business of education were shared by her Sydney-based sister and sister-in-law: 'How unfortunate you have been with your household help. It's all very well for a little while to have everything to do—but a little spell goes a long way ... Glad you are able to carry on Millicent's study at home. The trouble will be those domestic interruptions ...'; 'Fancy you & Millicent bustling round & doing all the work'.⁵⁶

Throughout 1902 Helen's health deteriorated, and in her search for a cure for her worsening insomnia, she spent large periods of time living in the family's hillside property in Cashmere and the new seaside Sumner cottage, away from her daughters and husband.⁵⁷ A miscarriage suffered in Montreux in early 1901 seems to have sapped her strength and vitality. Her sudden death in February 1903 at the age of 46, possibly from diphtheria, had a devastating impact on the family.⁵⁸ The changes that followed in the education of Millicent and Viola were, nonetheless, ones of form rather than substance. John Macmillan Brown had been as much its architect as Helen and, in the months that followed her death, the prevailing regimen was applied with even greater intensity. Millicent was now preparing for her first public examinations—the New Zealand university junior scholarship and the Sydney senior scholarship—and her recollection of the substitution of father for mother as teacher is unambiguous:

There began a bad period of about four months. I look back on it now with considerable sympathy for my father. I had none then, only resentment, and I think even hatred. Very much upset by the death of his wife and left alone to bring up a teenaged and a five-year-old

56 Mrs Robert Craig [Bessie Brown] to Helen Macmillan Brown, 8 May 1902, JMBP, A19/7; Pata [Maria Craig née Connon] to Helen Macmillan Brown, 25 April – May 1902, JMBP, A19/10.

57 John Macmillan Brown had these homes built for Helen in the hope that the hill and seaside air and environment would cure her insomnia.

58 Some doubt surrounds the cause of Helen Macmillan Brown's death on 22 February 1903 in Rotorua during a family holiday. Her death certificate officially attributes the cause of death to diphtheria, gangrene of the fauces (or back of the throat), and cardiac failure. John Macmillan Brown believed that his wife had contracted diphtheria during the sea voyage to Rotorua. Grossmann, however, notes that Helen did not display all of the major symptoms of the disease. Millicent, similarly, did not believe that her mother had diphtheria, later speculating that her death was more likely related to the miscarriage in 1901, after which family and friends noted a marked and inexplicable deterioration in Helen's overall health. There is a hint of medical misadventure. Lovell-Smith attributes Helen's death to a combination of causes: chronic and inexplicable insomnia, the miscarriage suffered in 1901 and diphtheria. See Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 84–88; Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 213–14; Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 27–29; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 105–6, 111–14.

daughter, he became exceedingly irritable and was unable to control his temper. Coaching me for the Junior Scholarship and the Sydney Senior, he naturally let it out on me. I wasn't the brilliant student he had expected me to be. I don't think I ever came anywhere near his expectation of me. I don't know that I was particularly stupid. I was, I think, just ordinary average, and I had too much to do. I toiled through French, German, Latin, English, Greek and Roman history and Modern history 1790-1815 ... Those four months were just pure hell, and I don't suppose they were much better for him ... Certainly at that time I saw no way out.⁵⁹

Nor was there much relief when a teacher from Christchurch Girls' High was employed as a mathematics tutor. Her complaints that Millicent had insufficient time to do work for her were rebuffed and Millicent recalls sitting up all Friday night preparing for her Saturday morning mathematics session.⁶⁰

Millicent's ultimate failure in the examinations did not deter Macmillan Brown from his desire that she should proceed to university. But it did lead him to abandon his attempt to educate his daughter at Holmbank. In February 1905, the 17-year-old Millicent was sent to her aunt in Sydney and enrolled at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Croydon. It was her longest continuous experience of school life, and Millicent was later to record 'extreme unalloyed delight' at her ultimate success in the matriculation exam.⁶¹ Her father's voice remained the determining one throughout her subsequent university years and his pocket the paying one. All were spent outside New Zealand. They began in 1906 at the University of Sydney, where she completed a degree in Latin, French and German in 1908, continued at Newnham College, Cambridge, where in 1912 she gained a second in the tripos, and ended abruptly with the outbreak of World War One in Germany, where she had begun PhD studies in Old French at Halle University.⁶² In her retrospective assessment of this period of her life, Millicent recalls her university experience as enjoyable, devoid of any sense of purpose or seriousness and marked by achievements that reflected

59 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 29–30.

60 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 30–31.

61 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 31.

62 By 1906, John Macmillan Brown had fallen out with some of his former Canterbury College colleagues, Millicent's prospective teachers, and decided that it would be in Millicent's best interests to attend another university.

effort expended.⁶³ Whatever its accuracy, it is an assessment that cannot obscure the reality that her education represents a full realisation of a feminine scholarly ideal formulated and pursued by Helen and John Macmillan Brown with unswerving determination. Yet, ultimately, the experiment was rescued by her attendance at a secondary school and at a distance from her father.

Millicent's childhood and education provided something of a template for her younger sister Viola. It did so within changing family circumstances. She was born in 1897 after both parents had retired, and her childhood was to be predominantly that of a motherless daughter with an older and frequently absent father. A governess, Gertrude Boulton, looked after her from birth, accompanying the family on a European sojourn in 1900, when Viola was two years old. After the death of Helen in 1903, when Viola was five, Gertrude assumed the maternal role. She was assisted by Millicent and occasionally the girls' aunts. Viola describes her experiences after her mother died as following a 'quiet pattern according to my father's theories. I had my lessons with Gertrude ... in the garden whenever possible, and, except for arithmetic (which I would not have chosen) I was free to choose what I wanted to learn—Spanish history, astronomy, botany, Romany and Sanscrit.' Her 'chief relationship' with her father was in the evenings when he told her stories and selected 'simple stories in French which he got me to read aloud to him to help me learn'.⁶⁴

There is some evidence that Macmillan Brown was less prescriptive in the management of his younger daughter's childhood. In his *Memoirs*, he describes Viola as a 'beautiful little replica' of her mother and observes that, after Helen's death, he 'seemed to go back again into the simplicity and receptiveness of childhood ... and Viola's happiness made me happy'.⁶⁵ Millicent later judged her father to have had a better relationship with Viola than with her.⁶⁶ Macmillan Brown was, indeed, often to be more accommodating in his treatment of his younger daughter. When she was 14 years of age, he gave into her pestering and allowed her to attend a school so that she could

63 Baxter, *Memoirs*, pp. 31–45; Baxter's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, p. xxv.

64 Notariello's introduction to Macmillan Brown's *Memoirs*, p. xxvii.

65 Macmillan Brown, *Memoirs*, pp. 214–15.

66 Baxter, *Memoirs*, p. 29. See also Griffith, *Out of the Shadows*, pp. 53, 129.

'be like the other children'.⁶⁷ Yet such concessions occurred within a framework that had changed little, if at all, from that which shaped Millicent's education. After Viola had matriculated in 1914 at age 17, her father resumed full control of her education, deciding that she would spend a year at home preparing for university. Her older sister Millicent, recently returned to the family from Germany, taught her French, German, Latin and Roman history during the day, and her father taught her Greek (traditionally a subject taught only to boys), middle English and essay writing in the evenings.⁶⁸

In her university studies Viola was to turn away from the path followed by her mother and sister, enrolling at the Canterbury College School of Art. Art sat ambiguously within the range of disciplines the Macmillan Browns believed could increase women's participation in the civic community. It was something to be cultivated like other accomplishments, but after the serious scholarly disciplines had been mastered. Seen in this context, Viola's passage through art school and subsequent periods of study in Sydney and London supported by her father suggests willingness to compromise when faced with talent and enthusiasm.⁶⁹ However we interpret Macmillan Brown's actions, they empowered an independent-minded daughter. As one of a small cluster of predominantly progressive young women artists calling themselves 'The Group', some of whom saw themselves as challenging the 'Victorian atmosphere' and 'collective conservatism of the Canterbury Society of Arts', Viola became part of a flourishing

67 Notariello's introduction, p. xxvii. The Rangī Ruru Girls' School Register, perhaps mistakenly, records both Millicent and Viola Macmillan Brown's attendance at the private Presbyterian girls' school in Christchurch from 1904. There is no other evidence of Millicent having attended the school.

68 Notariello's introduction, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

69 Notariello's introduction, pp. xxviii, xxx. Viola Macmillan Brown attended Julian Ashton's School of Art in Sydney for a period c. 1919, and studied painting in London and Europe in the 1920s.

local female artistic community.⁷⁰ It was a choice made possible by remaining her father's helpmate and companion until his death in 1935.

The Wilding Girls: '*Mens sana in corpore sano*'

The process of educating the Wilding girls and their brothers was recorded by their mother Julia in the separate diaries that she kept for each of her children from their births until death—theirs or her own.⁷¹ The detail and regularity of the entries stand as a marked contrast to the infant diary of Millicent Macmillan Brown kept (probably) by her mother for just 20 months. Indeed, the diaries of the Wilding children's lives reveal a mother consistently much closer and more directly involved in her children's developmental processes. The difference has a generational and philosophical dimension. Julia's thinking about children had occurred in Hereford, had been deeply influenced by her own family's interpretation of the writing of John Stuart Mill and was honed by her own experience. As a first generation, university-trained professional endeavouring to combine a career with motherhood at a time when the availability of domestic help was often limited, Helen's approach to motherhood relied upon her professional judgement and involvement, but there was less chance to chart and record its detail.

70 Margaret Lewis, *Ngaio Marsh: A Life*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991, p. 31; Neil Roberts, *Concise History of Art in Canterbury, 1850–2000*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 2000, p. 39. The Group included Evelyn Polson, Margaret Anderson, Edith Wall, Ngaio Marsh, Cora Wilding, Rhona Haszard, William Montgomery and W. S. Baverstock. There was, amongst the various members of the group, and likewise subsequently amongst art historians, some disagreement about the extent of their 'radicalism' as artists. See Lewis, *Ngaio Marsh*, pp. 30–31; Janet Paul and Neil Roberts, *Evelyn Page: Seven Decades*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery with Allen and Unwin, Christchurch and Wellington, 1986, pp. 69–74, 24; Julie King, *Olivia Spencer Bower: Making Her Own Discoveries*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2015, pp. 83, 85. Also: Julie A. Catchpole, 'The Group', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1984; Nadia Gush, 'The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League', *NZJH*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1–17; Nadia Joanne Gush, 'Cultural Fields of the Canterbury Plains: Women and Cultural Citizenship in Canterbury c 1890–1940', PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2007.

71 Life Events Diary of Gladys Wilding (GWLED) kept by Julia Wilding, (3 vols): vol. 1: November 1881 – 1 November 1885, vol. 2: 28 November 1885 – 13 May 1896, vol. 3: 1 May 1896 – 24 November 1905, WFP, box 14/64-66/1-3; Life Events Diary of Anthony Wilding (AWLED) kept by Julia Wilding, (2 vols): vol. 1: 1883–1889, vol. 2: 1889–1915, WFP, box 20/92-93/1-2; Life Events Diary of Cora Wilding (CWLED) kept by Julia Wilding, 1 vol.: 15 November 1888 – 4 April 1931, WFP, box 35/162/1. Life Events Diaries of Frank Wilding and Edwyn Wilding are kept in private hands.

Julia Wilding embraces the maternal role as a full-time profession of supreme importance and social significance, and one which she was prepared to give priority over all else. She employed nursemaids when her children were young, but as the Life Events Diaries show, they were clearly cast in the role of assistants to Julia in the physical care of the children. Young girls with little education, the nursemaids were instructed carefully, supervised closely and permitted little initiative. They often worked in Julia's presence and accompanied her when she took her large and growing family on outings to help care for the children.

The Life Events Diaries work on several different levels. They provide a repository of memories for a clearly doting mother and a record of factual information about the physical development and health of the children, with heights, weights and details of illnesses recorded systematically at the back of each child's diary. The accompanying commentary frequently takes on an almost scientific tone, as Julia attempts detached and analytical critiques of emerging personalities and all-round development, as well as the dynamics of family life. It is also often confessional in nature, revealing expectations and anxieties of an intensely committed mother. While the diaries are Julia's creation, they were in a sense not exclusively private in nature. The individual children were aware of their existence and sometimes shown entries, and, as we have seen, the records were destined to pass into their hands.⁷² It is perhaps this intention that encourages Julia to record and acknowledge the extent to which the Wilding family experiment was built around a much fuller paternal participation than has been held to be the contemporary norm.

At the philosophical heart of their family experiment, and, in the recall of the children, given frequent airing by their mother throughout their childhood, was the Latin maxim, '*Mens sana in corpore sano*'. The balanced cultivation of mind and body was pursued with such determination that it became something synonymous, if not with the pursuit of excellence, then at least with a high level of competency. In practice, this meant the study by all children, without gender differentiation, of a broad range of subjects: mathematics, the sciences,

72 See, for example, CWLED: 10 March 1895, 19 June 1895, 1 February 1896; Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days*, pp. 37, 63, 65, 66, 82; Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1990, p. 6.

history, languages and the arts. The specific and individual talents that emerged were then nurtured to their fullest expression. It was a demanding philosophy, which required a great deal of effort on both the part of the parents and the children. Yet it encompassed a belief in the value of play as well as work. Indeed, it was the melding of fun and seriousness, social duty and individual fulfilment that gave the Wilding experiment more chance of achieving the balance they espoused.

In Gladys, their first child to survive infancy, nature and nurture proved comfortable companions. From the day of her birth, 1 November 1881, the Wildings watched anxiously for signs of intelligence and strove to create a stimulating environment. Throughout her infancy they read books and sang nursery rhymes to her, played music, provided age-appropriate toys and experiences and played with and talked to her constantly. At 18 months Gladys was, her mother declared, ‘immensely intelligent and quick now, & understands everything’.⁷³ Quick to detect in Gladys’s behaviour an interest in reading and counting, Julia introduced formal lessons into her day, including teaching her the alphabet. By the time Gladys was three years and three months old, Julia announced that she could:

point out & name any letter of the alphabet in a book. I have tried to do it as an amusement, & should not have attempted if she did not like it, but every day, of herself, she asks me to do the letters with her. She only knows the capital letters yet, & to-day she was looking through a book & noticed all the dots over the i’s, & she asks me ‘what all those little black balls were for’.⁷⁴

The detailed and perceptive observation underlines the intensity of Julia’s involvement and it continued unabated. We learn:

Gladdie can also count up to 20 now, & in playing with the shells she is learning just the elementary rules of addition, subtraction & multiplication. She is extremely fond of doing all these things, & is certainly a very intelligent child, & has a wonderfully good memory.⁷⁵

⁷³ GWLED, 1 May 1883.

⁷⁴ GWLED, 1 February 1885.

⁷⁵ GWLED, 1 February 1885.

Four months later Gladys was 'getting on splendidly with her little things with me, & can quite read now. She is remarkably quick and intelligent & such a darling to teach, so observant, & interested in everything'.⁷⁶ By Christmas 1885, however, signs of waning interest were noted and strategies devised to rekindle it. A break from lessons was judged necessary: 'she has not been so good at them just lately, & I think she will begin again better perhaps'.⁷⁷ The comment appears relaxed enough but Julia's subsequent actions reveal how quickly her daughter's apparent loss of enthusiasm was interpreted as challenging the mother's fundamental belief in the necessity for hard work and self-discipline in the quest for self-improvement. Developing the talent of her daughter was the civic duty of the parent.

The response was a carefully constructed and conscientiously administered system of rewards and prizes. Gladys was to have 'a good or bad mark every day after her lessons, & when she has 40 good marks, she is to have a little book or prize'.⁷⁸ Julia remained unyielding and uncompromising in the face of Gladys's obvious distress; simply noting that she 'cries & is very unhappy'—when awarded a bad mark.⁷⁹ The seriousness of her intent becomes further apparent on 27 March 1886:

Gladys got her first prize today,—a scrap book. I give her a good or bad mark every day after lessons, & she was to have a prize when she had 40 good ones. Today she got her 48th good mark, as she had 8 bad ones & had to get the extra 8 good ones to counterbalance them & make up the 40 good. Woman was so delighted with her prize, & got Fanny to make her some paste at once, so as to begin pasting pictures in. She has been cutting pictures out that I give her, for a long while past.⁸⁰

The assistance of family and friends was enlisted in support of the new regime: 'Her father & Mr Lewis have both promised Gladys that they will give her a prize if she gets 40 good marks without a single bad one. She is most anxious about it, & she has already about 20 good marks,—without a bad one.'⁸¹ The relentlessness with which the

⁷⁶ GWLED, 3 June 1885.

⁷⁷ GWLED, 25 December 1885.

⁷⁸ GWLED, 28 December 1885.

⁷⁹ GWLED, 10 January 1886.

⁸⁰ GWLED, 27 March 1886.

⁸¹ GWLED, 12 July 1886.

regime is pursued suggests a desire to inculcate competitiveness, and a striving for excellence as a basis for precocious achievement. In its rationalist approach, it also bore some resemblance to the education of her hero John Stuart Mill by his father and Jeremy Bentham.⁸²

During the subsequent months the Life Events Diary abounds in detailed and anxious comment: 'Gladys can really read very well now, but I have not taught her spelling yet at all & from one or two questions I have sometimes asked her, I don't think she has any idea of it.'⁸³ While she was thought 'remarkably quick' and a 'very affectionate darling little woman' who 'likes to try at everything', she did 'not always quite like being shown the way'.⁸⁴ Increasingly, though, there are signs that Gladys was beginning to measure up. When '4 $\frac{3}{4}$ '-year-old Gladys's first letter to the 'Children's Corner' of the *Christchurch Weekly Press* was published, Julia noted proudly that she was the youngest child to have done so and that the next youngest to 'appear' was seven. Gladys, we are told, 'composed & wrote it all herself, the only help I gave her being to tell her how to spell the words'.⁸⁵ But the concession that Gladys was 'immensely fond' of producing 'real letters all written in capitals' was coupled with the observation that she did 'not much like her copy book lessons' and had been told by her mother that she would 'never write properly until she can make small letters too'.⁸⁶

A subsequent letter written shortly after Gladys turned five met with greater maternal approval:

Dear Mr Editor,

... Nearly every morning we go and help Emma to feed the fowls, and sometimes I give the grain. The rest of the morning I play with my brother Anthony and with our puppy dog, named Toby, and for an hour I do lessons with my mother. I do music treble clef, reading, sums and time table up to five times, & copy book, & in the afternoon I go for a walk with our nurse, & sometimes I go for a walk with my mother, and other times I go in the carriage to town. This morning

82 Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century*, Hutchinson, London, 1975, pp. 169–75.

83 GWLED, 12 July 1886.

84 GWLED, 12 July 1886.

85 GWLED, 18 September 1886.

86 GWLED, 9 October 1886.

I picked strawberries with my father. I have got a little brother named Anthony, and he came too and helped, and sometimes he pinches me and hurts me. I get up at a quarter-past seven in the morning and have a cold bath, and on Friday nights I have a warm bath. I go to bed at half-past six at night. On Thursday nights I have cocoa for tea, and sometimes I have breakfast with my mother and father.

Gladys Wilding
Five Years Old⁸⁷

It was not, of course, the full story, but the letter does capture something of the routine and regularity of Gladys's earliest years and the intensity of Julia's involvement in her daughter's education.

As their daughter approached her sixth birthday, the Wildings reassessed their approach to her education. Gladys now had three siblings (Anthony, Frank and Cora), and Julia had involved herself just as determinedly in their day-to-day education. It was nonetheless with reluctance that she began to consider placing Gladys in the care of a professional teacher: 'I am sorry to give up though, but it is an experiment we can but try', and one she hoped would bring 'increased stimulus and interest'.⁸⁸ The transition from having lessons with her mother and younger brother, Anthony, in the enclosed veranda-schoolroom at Fownhope took place in the summer of 1888, when they both began attending Miss Tabart's small, private school based in the home of a neighbouring family, the Andrew Andersons.⁸⁹ With at most 12 other pupils—boys and girls of varying ages—Julia believed Gladys was ensured a relatively high degree of individual attention.

The change did not signal any lessening of Julia's involvement in the day-to-day progress of her daughter's education. Julia determined Gladys's course of study and visited the school frequently, checking on both Miss Tabart's teaching and Gladys's progress. Examination marks and end of term school reports were scrutinised closely. Miss Tabart's

87 *Christchurch Weekly Press*, 14 December 1886; GWLED, 6 January 1886.

88 GWLED, 7 January 1888, 30 January 1888.

89 Andrew Anderson and his family lived in Wilson's Road, Opawa, close to Fownhope; his children Mabel, Gladys and Frederick were classmates of Gladys and Anthony in Miss Tabart's school (GWED, 1 November 1893). Andrew Anderson and his brother, John, ran the city's leading engineering and construction company, J. & A. Andersons, a family business founded in 1857 by their Scottish father, John Anderson (1820–1897), who was also a local politician. See Gordon Ogilvie, *The Port Hills of Christchurch*, Reed, Auckland, 1991, pp. 125–28, 131; P. G. Lowe, 'Anderson, John (1820–1897)', *DNZB*, vol. 1, pp. 4–5.

observation that she had 'never seen such a clever child' was recorded and elaborated by an ever-attentive Julia: 'She certainly is marvellously quick at learning and grasping things.'⁹⁰ During school holidays she seized the chance to resume her teaching role. For her part, Gladys managed the transition from home to school with such apparent ease that her mother gradually extended the range of subjects she studied until, by 1891, it included Latin, botany, elementary science, writing, arithmetic, composition, literature, geography and drawing.

It was the closeness of Julia's involvement with her daughter's education that ushered in a decisive shift of emphasis. When Gladys had difficulty shrugging off a lingering cold at the end of May 1892, Julia reacted by arranging for her daughter to spend two terms at Miss Mannering's private school for girls in Sumner, a seaside suburb favoured by the middle classes for its healthy climate.⁹¹ A weekly boarder, she returned home at the weekends, and Julia was able to monitor closely both her health and the impact the change was having upon her daughter's education. From the outset Gladys's intellectual ability was judged far in advance of her age group, and when Miss Mannering expressed the opinion that 'she ought to be doing more' and subsequently increased the level of difficulty in her work, Julia welcomed the move.⁹² There were five other girls at the school, ranging in age from 11 to 16, and we learn that Gladys outperformed them all in the examinations for scripture history, geography, science, grammar rules, Roman history, dates, mythology, grammar, Australian geography, English history and spelling. As an educational experiment, as the *Life Events Diary* shows, the time at Sumner was judged a spectacular success.

Indeed, a bemused and slightly uncomfortable Julia recorded the enthusiasm the stimulus of competition seemed to generate in her daughter. Gladys now threw herself into her lessons with apparently boundless energy and approached her examinations without fear. The eagerness drew the maternal observation that her daughter was 'certainly very ambitious and anxious to get on' and a concern that balance had been lost: 'The only fear is that she may overdo' her

90 GWLED, 12 May 1889.

91 GWLED, 15 May 1892 – 15 December 1892.

92 GWLED, 25 September 1892.

lessons 'a little'.⁹³ Gladys left the school at the end of the last term for 1892, taking with her a book she had been awarded as a prize: 'Mrs Mannering told her she was very pleased, & considered that she had made very good progress in everything.'⁹⁴ Across the summer of 1892–93 the blossoming of Gladys's intellectual aptitudes was assessed, and the form of her future education came increasingly to resemble that which Julia had herself experienced in Hereford.

We can now observe greater confidence in Julia's handling of her daughter's education. She had successfully ushered her daughter through the years of early childhood and now began to take a pleasure in a precociously talented and biddable daughter entering a stage of her education that she remembered with pleasure from her own childhood. Julia's preference was for Gladys to return to Fownhope and be taught by a 'daily governess' and a range of specialist tutors. Such a formula would undoubtedly have given greater opportunity for maternal supervision and involvement. For 1893, a compromise was reached: Gladys attended Miss Tabart's school for the mornings and in the afternoons attended private lessons with specialist tutors in drawing, Euclid and algebra, the latter subject being one she excelled at and in which, Julia pointed out, few girls received instruction. In 1894 attempts to secure a suitable governess were abandoned and, with some misgivings on Julia's part, Gladys was enrolled as a 'day scholar' at William and Drusilla Wilson's Cranmer House School for girls and boys, in Cranmer Square: 'we are going to try this, & I do hope it will be successful'.⁹⁵ A medium-sized school with approximately 70 pupils, run by the English-born and professionally trained teachers William Wilson, formerly head of the Normal School and Teacher's Training College lecturer, and his wife Drusilla, who had worked at a teacher training institution in Brighton, England, it catered for the children of professional families seeking higher education for their sons and increasingly their daughters.⁹⁶ Julia was impressed that, while the

93 GWLED, 15 July 1892, 25 September 1892.

94 GWLED, 15 December 1892.

95 GWLED, 25 March 1894.

96 David Wilson, 'Wilson's School, 1892–1908 and Wirihana School 1909–1927', ms, CMDRC, folder 1130; 'Information about Wilson's School in Cranmer Square 1892–1927' (Wilson, William and Drusilla), CMDRC, ARC 1900.527. Drusilla Wilson was a student of John Macmillan Brown at Canterbury College in 1892 and was also on the founding committee of the Canterbury Women's Institute, a feminist organisation established in Christchurch in 1892. Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, p. 72.

boys and girls were taught in separate classes, the curriculum was the same, apart from some additional subjects for the girls, and included Latin.

In this environment Gladys continued to blossom academically. We hear little of Julia's reaction to the traditionally female subjects of singing, drawing, needlework and French, taught to the girls by Drusilla Wilson. But there was no doubting Julia's views upon her daughter's response to her academic work: she 'simply loves her lessons' and was 'quite devoted' to William Wilson.⁹⁷ Performance matched perception. After coming 'second of the whole school' at the end of 1894, 13-year-old Gladys was, with Julia's enthusiastic encouragement, 'withdrawn from ordinary classes in order to pursue her special course of study for matriculation'.⁹⁸ She approached the examinations with her by now customary fervour and confidence, earning within the Wilding family the nickname 'No. 46', her candidate number.⁹⁹ With an 'average of nearly 70 per cent' in English, Latin, French, geography, arithmetic, algebra and Euclid, she passed all subjects. It was her first experience of a national examination, and the success fuelled both mother and daughter's eagerness for comparison and competitive streaks. To satisfy their desire to 'find out how she passed, & her percentage of marks', the family worked through their contacts within the university community.¹⁰⁰

Gladys clearly stood on the cusp of an academic future. Significantly, Julia sought the advice and reassurance of her brother and scholar, Edwyn, to whom she sent Gladys's matriculation exam papers. His response was both reassuring and unsettling. He 'strongly advises us to let her go on for her degree', noted Julia, adding that he had sent her the London University entrance papers for comparison with the University of New Zealand equivalents.¹⁰¹ We do not learn whether Edwyn suggested that Gladys might study at London University, where it was already possible for a woman to graduate. Nor is there any evidence that Julia and Frederick considered the possibility. The appeal to Edwyn was more a matter of maternal pride than an

97 GWLED, 4 April 1894, 11 July 1894.

98 GWLED, 19 December 1894, 10 March 1895; letter to Frederick Wilding from William Wilson, principal of Cranmer House School, 2 May 1895.

99 GWLED, 2 November 1895, 10 December 1895 – 18 December 1895.

100 GWLED, 18 December 1895 – 31 January 1896, 8 March 1896.

101 GWLED, 8 March 1896, 26 September 1896.

indicator of any colonial insecurity. In any event, there was much to do. The 14-year-old Gladys was deemed too young to sit the junior university scholarship examination, success in which would confer a degree of financial independence as well as academic prestige. Consequently, between 1896 and 1898 she effectively assumed the lifestyle of a university student. She spent two to three days each week at Cranmer House School, where she received individual tuition from William Wilson. The rest of the time she studied at home, and her educational program was once more carefully crafted by her mother.

Gladys's days at Fownhope resembled those experienced by her mother some 40 years previously in Hereford. There were lessons in music, elocution and dancing with specialist tutors. And, just as her brothers had done at the Elms, Julia designed a reading program built around the works of the nineteenth-century intellectuals and theorists who had shaped her own thinking: Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin. To them she added Macaulay's multi-volumed *History of England*, with its confident depiction of British history as a progressive march towards a more liberal society, and the more recent additions to the growing body of evolutionary and rationalist thought, most notably S. Laing's *Human Origins* (1892). Such study was integrated with work being done at Cranmer School, where Gladys was preparing essays on the South African question and the Spanish-American War. The feminist strand in Julia's thinking was evident also in the inclusion of the *Recollections of Mary Somerville* (1780–1872), in which her daughter Martha chronicled her pioneering work as a woman scientist.¹⁰²

The attempt to win a scholarship was invested with a degree of feminist significance. Gladys had spent the great majority of her schooling alongside boys, and she had plainly not been intimidated intellectually by their presence. At the beginning of 1898 Julia observed that Gladys had 'set her heart on not only winning a scholarship but also

102 A reading list constructed by Julia Wilding for Gladys Wilding was placed at back of GWLED vol. 2. It also included Camille Flammarion's *Popular Astronomy*, Buckle's *History of Civilisation*, *The Rise and Decline of Rationalism*, 'Grieg's works', 'S. Laing's works' and Martha Somerville, *Personal Recollections, From Early Life to Old Age, of Mary Somerville*, Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1874. Samuel Laing (1812–1897), British railway administrator, liberal politician and popular science writer offered an optimistic view of the 'progressive modernity'. His works included *Modern Science and Modern Thought* (1885), *Problems of the Future and Essays*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1889, and *A Modern Zoroastrian*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1892.

coming out at the head of the list, a position which, so far, no girl has attained'.¹⁰³ She permitted herself to wonder whether Gladys 'could get anything like' the previous year's top score achieved by a boy.¹⁰⁴ In the event, 17-year-old Gladys came sixth on the credit list, and her failure to win one of the 14 junior scholarships awarded in 1898 was therefore doubly disappointing. It was Gladys's first experience of academic disappointment, and, given the closeness with which mother and daughter had been involved in the preparation for it, the failure deeply affected both of them. Julia was at first philosophical: 'I think we really ought to be satisfied as girlie is only just seventeen, & so many go in two or even three times. The boy M. Blair of Nelson who heads the scholarship list, was 8th on the credit list last year.'¹⁰⁵ She was not too surprised, but plainly dubious, when Gladys announced that she would sit the examination again at the end of 1899, despite the pair's intention to travel 'Home' that year to visit friends and family: 'I don't see how she can possibly gain one, as she will not be able to work very much while we are in England.'¹⁰⁶

Doubt was soon replaced by determination. The combined resources of mother and daughter, aided by Julia's elder brother, the Oxford-educated mathematician and scholar, Edwyn, turned the trip 'Home' into an opportunity to mount a serious effort to secure the scholarship. Once the Wildings were established within the family network in Hereford, Edwyn, as Julia put it, took Gladys 'in hand with her mathematics'—the subject in which her mark was lowest in the previous year's examination—and devoted several hours each day to the task. A master from Hereford Cathedral School, one of her father's old schools, was engaged to provide daily Latin lessons. After spending at least three hours each day in study, Gladys returned to New Zealand three weeks before the scholarship examinations. Once back in Christchurch, Julia arranged for daily Latin lessons with some last-minute coaching by her former teacher, William Wilson, at Fownhope.¹⁰⁷

103 GWLED, 3 February 1898.

104 GWLED, 3 February 1898.

105 GWLED, 3 February 1899.

106 GWLED, 3 February 1899.

107 GWLED, 15 May 1899, 25 November 1899.

As an example of maternal, familial and personal commitment and cooperation, Gladys's preparation for the scholarship examination plainly rivals, if not surpasses, the effort and attention evident in the education of the Macmillan Brown girls. It was to bear fruit. Placed sixth on the scholarship list, she was one of only two Christchurch girls to be successful. The reactions of mother and daughter capture the high standards they set themselves. Gladys was 'very happy' but confessed that, as Julia reports, 'she cannot be perfectly satisfied, as she did not head the list,—her great ambition'. Declaring herself 'quite satisfied', Julia suggests that had Gladys been 'working steadily all this year, she would probably have come out on top'.¹⁰⁸ In Hereford, Charles and Edwyn celebrated their niece's success in the family-owned and operated *Hereford Times*, emphasising that she was the 'highest girl' on the list and giving public support to Julia's private view that with a less disrupted year Gladys would have topped the list. Looking to the future, they predicted a 'distinguished university career' for their talented niece.¹⁰⁹

If there was one thing that distinguished Julia Wilding's attitude to the education of her children, it was an insistence that life possessed a cultural dimension and that the appreciation of music should be foremost in the education of all children. Looking back upon her life in 1924, she explained her attachment to music in passionate terms:

All fine music is uplifting. Love of humanity, striving after better things, high ideals of life, to me are all embodied or expressed in Beethoven's Symphonies, Mendelssohn's concerted music etc, etc. Yes, music is a joy,—sacred, ennobling, soothing, stimulating, and it means more to me than anything in the world, except Love, in its widest sense.¹¹⁰

In general, she had previously explained her views on the place of fine arts more prosaically. Music, singing, acting, drawing and painting possessed a potential to enrich life for the individual and community alike. They were disciplines whose mastery required effort and persistence—attributes she believed to be commendable social values. As a talented, European-trained pianist who had performed publicly, she poured scorn on the notion that piano playing was

108 GWLED, 25 January 1900.

109 Cutting from *HT*, pasted into GWLED, (vol. 3), next to entry for 29 June 1900.

110 Julia Wilding, 'Note', January 1924, WFP, box 12/61/142.

a feminine accomplishment and a mere adornment to drawing-room entertainment. Rather it was a discipline in which progress and skill were to a degree measurable by formal examination and performance. As such, it was appropriate for serious study by both girls and boys.

Julia gave all her children music lessons and strove to share her love of music with them, but it was Gladys who was judged the most musically gifted, and the full weight of maternal expectation was exerted in an effort to develop her latent talent. Julia had first detected that Gladys 'had a good ear' when her daughter was two-and-a-half and began teaching her to read music, and the following year to play the piano: 'her little fingers do not go very well at present, but she is proud of beginning to "play" as she calls it, & I think will get on'.¹¹¹ She continued to give Gladys daily music lessons after the girl began attending Miss Tabart's school and also expected Miss Tabart to oversee half an hour's practice each day, providing a table of 'exactly what is to be practised'.¹¹² By the age of seven, Gladys had begun playing duets with her mother at public concerts for charities, with much praise bestowed upon the pair to Julia's delight.¹¹³ Exactly how Gladys felt about it is unclear. There is, however, a suggestion in Julia's diary entries that an element of coercion was sometimes necessary. Gladys's interest level waxed and waned, at times 'going to the piano herself' and on other occasions preferring theoretical exercises to playing.¹¹⁴

Nonetheless, the generally biddable Gladys continued her piano lessons and achieved a standard that encouraged her mother's ambitions. In 1893 she employed a piano tutor to teach Gladys twice a week in the hope that the change might prove more stimulating. To an extent, the ploy succeeded, and at the end of the year Gladys made her first public performance in a concert arranged for young performers.¹¹⁵ Between 1894 and 1897 Gladys studied for and passed her junior, second and third-year music examinations conducted by Canterbury College. In the latter year, both mother and daughter began to take accompaniment lessons with a private tutor. Indeed Julia's reluctance to let the more academic studies squeeze the piano from her daughter's life held firm until the winter of her matriculation year. Music lessons

111 GWLED, 22 January 1884, 25 January 1887.

112 GWLED, 25 January 1892.

113 GWLED, 7 June 1889, 15 October 1889, 7 October 1890, 3 December 1891.

114 GWLED, 8 March 1890, 1 July 1892.

115 GWLED, 5 February 1893, 30 May 1893, 3 October 1893.

were also abandoned during her preparation for the scholarship examination. There remained a strong maternal pressure upon Gladys to practise by herself.¹¹⁶ With a touch of sadness, Julia acknowledged that the demands of university studies would not leave time for the piano, and marked a waste of talent.¹¹⁷

The centrality of music in Julia's life and her sustained effort to nurture whatever musical talent she discerned in her daughter did not prevent her from providing all her children with the opportunity to explore the arts more generally. Indeed, in sharp contrast to Helen Connon's injunction that cast the arts aside until the academic heights had been conquered, Julia Wilding embraced them as an essential part of a balanced education. As an active member of the musical community, she and Frederick were part of the city's cultural community and able to take such opportunities as it provided to enhance the educational opportunities of their children. From the middle-class young girls attending morning classes at the Canterbury College of Art they chose a Miss Stoddart, one of four sisters who enrolled at the college when it was established in 1882, to instruct Gladys in the rudiments of drawing and painting.¹¹⁸ It was also from within this embryonic cultural milieu that they sought out opportunities for Gladys (and all their children) to develop such confidence as might be gained from exposure to the performance arts, most notably dance and recital classes.¹¹⁹ Such training, it was hoped, would provide the composure that would allow them in time to take a leading part in community life.

The importance of Julia Wilding's role in the education of Gladys is undeniable, but it is equally clear that the part played by her father provides evidence of greater involvement than the stereotype of the remote and rigid patriarch allows. Indeed, highly educated nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women such as Julia operated with, and at times skilfully exploited, the support and encouragement of fathers, brothers and husbands of liberal, progressive persuasion. Frederick

116 GWLED, 31 July 1895, 3 February 1898.

117 GWLED, 15 November 1901.

118 This was possibly Margaret Stoddart (1865–1934), who became known for her flower paintings and was the most successful artist of the sisters. New Zealand artist Evelyn Page writes of Stoddart giving private art lessons: Paul and Roberts, *Evelyn Page*, pp. 24–25.

119 GWLED, 24 July 1894: Gladys and Anthony begin attending monthly public performance classes, where they had to recite poetry, play a piece of music, sing, act or deliver a speech. Dance lessons began for them both on 30 May 1891.

Wilding was the dominant male influence in his daughters' childhoods. His part in the discussions between husband and wife that provided the backdrop to the decisions that shaped the education of Gladys remains shadowy, compressed in the 'we have decided' entries by Julia in the Life Events Diaries.¹²⁰ Nonetheless his was an encouraging and involved presence. He read Gladys stories, took an interest in her activities, helped her with her French and music and offered comments on her essays.¹²¹ What is abundantly clear, however, is that his role in securing the health and physical fitness of his children was paramount and constitutes an integral part of the education of all the Wilding children.

His boyish enthusiasm for games, which captured the attention of his children and lingered long in their childhood memories, rested, as we have seen, upon a belief in their role in providing the necessary balance between the needs of mind and body. It converged neatly with Julia's belief that girls and young women should assert their right to cultivate their physical strength and endurance and lead energetic lives. It led naturally to an almost spartan household regime of cold baths, fresh air and plain food. His belief in the efficacy of games led him to create what might be seen as a child-centred home at Fownhope, resplendent with tennis courts, croquet green, cricket pitch and swimming baths. There was room for bicycles, roller skates and go-carts, and boisterous play saw the Wilding children careering around the neighbourhood. It is perhaps not too fanciful to see this environment as helping to instil competitiveness that recognised few, if any, gender boundaries.¹²²

The Wildings' family environment provided greater scope for social engagement with a more varied section of society than the comparatively cloistered Macmillan Brown household. Throughout the childhoods of Gladys and her siblings, Fownhope was the setting for countless social afternoons of tennis, music and food, as Julia and Frederick entertained international sporting teams, Antarctic explorers, musicians, politicians and community leaders.¹²³

120 For some examples, see GWLED, 18 August 1888, 27 May 1892; and AFWLED, 29 May 1895.

121 For some examples, see GWLED, 1 September 1889, 6 June 1894.

122 Cora Wilding, 'Notes and Information on the Life of Julia Wilding', WFP; Gladys, Anthony and Cora Wilding's Life Events Diaries, *passim*.

123 Events Diaries kept by Julia Wilding, 2 vols: 1879–1908, 1909–1942, WFP, box 11/54–55; Fownhope Visitor's Book: 1911–1945, 1975, WFP, box 11A/56c/56c. See also LED.

The relative informality of the occasions provided space for children and the opportunity for them to develop social awareness. It is perhaps a measure of Frederick's involvement in his children's lives that he quickly became the main attraction at the regular children's parties held at Fownhope for as many as 70 girls and boys. As a veritable master of games, he entertained the children with fireballs and organised every imaginable running race: sack, egg and spoon, and three-legged, as well as the conventional variety. By precept and example he hoped to stimulate participation, and as his children grew older he encouraged them to organise their own mixed tennis tournaments and children-only dances at the family home. Above all else, Frederick's enthusiasm for games for all was deeply infused with a desire to cultivate excellence amongst those with sporting talent. This aspect of his involvement with his children became more evident in the education of his son Anthony. In Gladys's upbringing we can see Frederick's sporting enthusiasms as providing the balance so much prized by a mother in theory, but in practice almost compromised in a quest for musical and scholarly excellence.

In 1900 Gladys confidently embarked upon an arts degree at Canterbury College. An objective she had anticipated since her teens, it rested upon the firm foundations of a carefully constructed education, and was made more secure by the pioneering generation of women graduates, whose success encouraged emulation and eroded opposition. Gladys had grown to maturity in a household where feminist goals had been quietly pursued and university study was viewed as a right won by merit alone. She was comfortable within an institution that had by 1900 seen more than 100 women graduates pass through its gates and appears to have rejected suggestions that the ancient universities of 'Home' might have more to offer.¹²⁴ Cambridge and Oxford might be attractive destinations for the sons of the colonial middle class, but, as Julia and Gladys were well aware, they were reluctant to confer degrees upon women. London University, as her uncle Edwyn had pointed out, had been doing so since 1880. Whatever its attractions, the congenial and familiar environment of Canterbury College was embraced with enthusiasm.

¹²⁴ Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, p. 106; Gardner, 'Formative Years', p. 157; Matthews, *In Their Own Right*, pp. 88–89.

Like the great majority of female students, Gladys pursued an arts degree built around English and French. Distinctions and prizes followed: the University of New Zealand Bowen Prize (1902) for her essay on the Indian Mutiny, the French Exhibition (1902), the University of New Zealand senior scholarship for French and English (1903). A BA degree with first-class honours in French and second-class honours in English was conferred in 1903 and an MA, with first-class honours in French and English languages and literature, in 1904. Throughout Gladys's studies her parents' level of interest changed little though circumstances led to a gradual increase in their involvement. Towards the end of her first university year she was struck by a debilitating and unexplained back problem that forced her to reduce her attendance at lectures, relinquish her junior scholarship and work mostly at home. Her greater presence at Fownhope encouraged both mother and father to engage more frequently with the progress of her studies. Both parents read her essays, discussed marker's comments and offered encouragement. Frederick was so impressed with his daughter's essay on the Indian Mutiny that he had it published.¹²⁵ It was with scarcely contained maternal pride after Gladys's graduation in June 1904 that Julia Wilding acknowledged the realisation of a family endeavour: 'we are so very pleased ... She has got all she wanted & worked for now, & it is a splendid winding up to her university career'.¹²⁶

In terms of her mother's professed objectives, talent had been nurtured and rewarded; Gladys had become an educated, cultured individual and was ready to make a useful contribution to society. The possibility of knowing the precise form this might take was tragically denied by Gladys's sudden death on 19 October 1905, aged 23. A week after she gained her master's degree from Canterbury College, she had sailed for Europe as she had long planned. The decision was loaded with educational purpose. Gladys wanted the chance to try out her foreign language skills and Julia provided, as she was to do for all her children who travelled abroad, a list of books to be read and museums and art galleries to visit. In late October 1904, however, Gladys was diagnosed with spinal tuberculosis. During the months in England spent lying flat on her back waiting to recover, she became increasingly anxious

125 Gladys J. Wilding, *The Indian Mutiny of 1857: Its Causes and Results* (New Zealand University Bowen Essay 1901), Lyttelton Times Co., Christchurch, 1902; GWLED, 25 February 1902.

126 GWLED, 17 February 1904, 24 June 1904.

to 'feel capable of earning a little myself'.¹²⁷ For several months she worked steadily editing and indexing the manuscript of *Two Years in the Antarctic* written by Albert Armitage, a friend and member of the 1901–4 British national Antarctic expedition.¹²⁸ The experience stimulated her interest in the natural sciences and led her to contemplate writing a book on New Zealand flora and fauna as well as enrolling for a science degree upon her return to Christchurch.¹²⁹ Nature and nurture had produced an industrious and enthusiastic scholar seemingly about to make herself useful.

In the second Wilding daughter nature and nurture often proved uncomfortable companions. How to solve the problem of Cora was a constant preoccupation for both parents, and adjustments were made within the parameters of the educational framework that continued to shape their daughters' education, in order to accommodate a different set of talents. The fourth child in the Wilding family, born in 1888, Cora was seven years Gladys's junior and for her first nine years the youngest member of the family. Within this increasingly busy household, the less biddable Cora emerges, at least in the judgement of her parents, as an excitable and energetic girl: intelligent, strong willed, quick tempered and ill-disciplined. By the time she was three years old Cora was declared by her mother to be 'the most difficult to manage of all the children', though Julia expressed the hope that she would 'get better as she grows older'.¹³⁰ What followed was a process of experimentation in which Julia and Frederick sought to harness such talents as they detected. In essence, the education of Cora involved greater use of professional teachers away from Fownhope as a day student and as a boarder at some distance from Christchurch.

The process began in September 1892 at Miss March's private kindergarten in Opawa near Fownhope, and it continued there until 1897.¹³¹ We learn something of what Cora did and how Miss March

127 Letter from Gladys Wilding to Julia Wilding, 11 March 1905, WFP, box 17/82/104.

128 Albert Borlase Armitage, *Two Years in the Antarctic: Being a Narrative of the British National Antarctic Expedition*, Edward Arnold, London, 1905. A captain in the British Navy, Scottish Albert Armitage (1864–1943) was Robert Falcon Scott's navigator and second-in-command on the *Discovery* expedition to Antarctica (1901–4). Along with other members of the expedition, Armitage attended tennis parties at Fownhope when their ship docked in Lyttelton in 1901.

129 Letters from Gladys Wilding to Julia Wilding, 11 March 1905, 5 June 1905, WFP, box 17/82/104, box 17/83/115.

130 CWLED, 28 January 1892.

131 CWLED, 20 September 1892 – December 1897.

assessed her progress from a surviving report: 'reading (attentive), writing (improving slowly), arithmetic (good), drawing (painstaking) and occupations (rather untidy)'. We learn also that while Cora was late 16 times and absent five times, her general conduct was thought 'attentive and good'.¹³² During the school holidays, it was elder sister Gladys, and not her mother, who continued the general daily lessons.¹³³ Julia persisted with singing and piano tuition for some 18 months before observing that Cora's 'little temper shows here too sometimes, & I think she would make better progress with a stranger than with me'.¹³⁴ By 1897 the music lessons had also been passed to Miss March. Progress was 'very slow' and Julia was disappointed: 'She does not like it all, & will not practise at home as she ought.'¹³⁵

In February 1898 the 10-year-old was sent to Mr Wilson's school, as had Gladys and her brothers. The decision was made with some trepidation, and her doubts issued in an outpouring of maternal anxiety:

Cora is a very difficult little woman to manage. She is passionate & very naughty & rude sometimes, but she has very strong feelings & very high spirits & is exceedingly affectionate. She needs a lot of patience in dealing with her, & I often feel that I have not half enough. She really is very trying & I cannot help being cross sometimes when I know I ought only to be very patient. Cora's is one of those dispositions which can be made or marred according to the way she is managed, & I often feel that I am deficient in the patience and forbearance which I am sure ought to be the foundation of managing her.¹³⁶

Wilson's Cranmer House School proved to be a short-term solution; Julia subsequently planned a trip 'Home' with Gladys for the following year and decided it would be best for Cora to stay at a boarding school in her absence. Consequently, in 1899 Cora was sent to Mrs Torlesse's school in Rangiora, 32 kilometres from Christchurch, where in an all-girls' class she was taught Latin, 'Kindergarten' (reading, writing and arithmetic) and drawing. On Julia's return to Christchurch in November 1899, she noted an improvement in Cora's manners as a

132 'Kindergarten I Report for Third Term, 1892. Cora Wilding' (Miss March's kindergarten, Opawa), CWLED.

133 For an example, see CWLED, 31 July 1895.

134 CWLED, 28 February 1896.

135 CWLED, 24 September 1898.

136 CWLED, 14 February 1898.

result of the boarding experience, though her concerns seemingly lingered.¹³⁷ The search for a solution to the problem of Cora's education began in earnest the following year with an attempt to educate Cora and her special friend, Ruth Anderson, at Fownhope with a 'daily governess'. Julia was soon to confess that while Miss Smythe was 'very nice with Cora' she was 'hardly strict enough'.¹³⁸ Behind these worries lurked the realisation that her daughter did not make enough effort. Such a thought was a troubling one since industry was fundamental to a good and useful life:

Cora is certainly not very fond of her work, & is not an industrious girlie. I was talking to Miss Smythe about her, & she thinks that she would make much more progress if she took a real interest in her work, but at present Cora does not seem to have a pronounced taste for anything ... Cora is the most impulsive, maddest girlie possible, but so affectionate & loving.¹³⁹

The conclusion that boarding school might be the answer to the perceived problem of Cora was nonetheless resisted for now. Instead, in 1901 Cora was enrolled at Christchurch Girls' High School, something of a nursery for Canterbury College students, with a reputation for academic achievement, hard work and strong female role models.¹⁴⁰

Cora struggled in the new environment, where she had 'impositions' or detention nearly every day. The ever vigilant Julia was satisfied that Cora was made to work a great deal harder and had much more homework, though she insisted that she was put in a lower class. Her emergence as a talented athlete and tennis player was similarly read as a sign of greater endeavour. Yet before the verdict of the teachers appeared in their end of year school report for 1902—a report that showed Cora had come second in three subjects (algebra, Euclid and English literature) and third in 'mathematics total'—Julia reported:

137 CWLED, 21 January 1899, 1 February 1899, 5 February 1899, 26 February 1899, 15 November 1899, 21 December 1899.

138 CWLED, 10 February 1900, 28 February 1900, 9 March 1900.

139 CWLED, 3 June 1900.

140 CWLED, 31 January 1900. For information about Christchurch Girls' High School see Peddie, *Christchurch Girls' High School*; Lovell-Smith, *Easily the Best*, pp. 31, 41–54, 66–67, 71–75; Grossmann, *Life of Helen Macmillan Brown*, pp. 44–45; Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, pp. 97–98.

We have just decided to send Cora to Nelson College [in the Tasman district] next year. We think the discipline & going away from home for a while, will be good for her & we have heard that it is such a good school & such a nice set of girls there. Cora is herself delighted at the thought of going.¹⁴¹

As much as anything, the decision reveals a mother's determination to explore to the full all possibilities of nurturing whatever innate talent her daughter possessed. There are hints also that it was a decision shaped in part by the desire to provide an opportunity for Cora away from the shadow of her high achieving older sister, now distinguishing herself at Canterbury College.

Nelson College for Girls was staffed by university graduates and disciples of Helen and John Macmillan Brown, and prided itself upon getting girls through matriculation exams. By Julia's assessment Cora was 'getting on famously' there.¹⁴² In her academic studies she topped her class in arithmetic and geography and was second in Euclid and, despite expressing reservations that she was not 'altogether competent', was placed on the school magazine committee.¹⁴³ On the playing fields she had been appointed captain of the Boarders' hockey team in 1904, judged its best back and all-round player, and she also won prizes in swimming and played water polo. Despite the promising progress, in September 1904 Julia wrote that 'Cora is not going in for Matriculation after all this year'.¹⁴⁴ The decision embodied a recognition by Julia that an academic future of the kind envisaged for Gladys was simply not appropriate for her younger daughter. It was followed by the construction of an equally thorough educational program built around an emerging artistic talent. After much consultation within the artistic community, lessons in drawing and painting were arranged, both at Fownhope and in the city. At Julia's insistence Cora attended classes, as a cultural student, in French and English literature at Canterbury College.¹⁴⁵ In September 1905 Julia was to acknowledge that nature

141 CWLED, 26 September 1902. For Cora Wilding's experiences at Christchurch Girls' High School, see also entries in her Life Events Diary for 1901: 9 February, 16 March, 30 April, 19 May, 14 June, 29 October, 8 December; 1902: 20 February, 22 May, 21 October, 22 November.

142 CWLED, 19 July 1904. On Nelson College for Girls, see, for example, Chambers, *Lessons for Ladies*, pp. 153–54.

143 CWLED, 11 May 1903, 4 July 1904.

144 CWLED, 17 September 1904.

145 CWLED, 9 February 1905.

and nurture had at last reached equilibrium: 'I think Cora is getting on with her painting and drawing ... & is more persevering at it I think than anything else.'¹⁴⁶

In its recognition of persistence, the observation looks backwards to a decade or more of familial encouragement and points the way to an approved future for her daughter. Within a month, Gladys had tragically died, and, while accompanying her parents on a pilgrimage to visit their daughter's grave in Eastbourne, Cora took the opportunity to have art lessons in London. On return to New Zealand she studied at the Christchurch School of Art, between 1907 and 1911. There followed two years in England and Europe studying painting, funded by her father. At the end of 1913, aged 24, she gave her first exhibition in Christchurch. That same year her parents had a studio built for her on the family property at Fownhope and began providing her with an allowance of £100 per year.

Several broad conclusions may be drawn from the education of the Wilding and Macmillan Brown daughters: the process occurred within mother–daughter relationships of unusual attention; within each family we may identify an adaptability and flexibility, as each couple recognise and adjust to the personality of their children; fathers played supportive and sometimes crucial roles. Julia Wilding's meticulous and demanding involvement in the education of her first daughter, Gladys, possessed elements of the unrelenting rationalism characteristic of her hero John Stuart Mill's own education, and normally associated with Benthamite utilitarianism. Moderated by a quest for balance and cultural awareness, the apparent rigidities of this approach were also softened by a personality grounded in a psychological and emotional understanding of individual needs. As university graduate and headmistress, Helen Macmillan Brown's relationship with her daughters was expressed in ways that later seemed to them to be aloof and distant. She sought to create for her young daughters a learning program tailored to their individual needs and did so within a sheltered family environment. Her tragic early death prevents us from fully assessing the adjustments that are clearly evident within the Wilding family as both parents respond to the quite different challenges presented by their second daughter.

146 CWLED, 10 September 1905.

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