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The Responsibility of American Women to Citizenship

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ANYONE who has received the benefits of a college education owes a big debt to society; in no other nation in the world is it possible to educate for any citizen, man or woman, rich or poor, high or low, to have education at public expense from the kindergarten thru the college, and consequently in no country is so much due in conscientious, unselfish citizenship.

I have chosen, however, to discuss the obligations of women for two reasons: first, because it is good that women should consider how rapidly this country has made development for them possible, and second, because having so recently received citizenship, they must at once sense the obligations which accompany it.

This nation is very young. Nothing has ever brought this to my mind so strongly as the fact that my grandfather, who was born two years after Washington's first inauguration, and my father, who has been gone only two years, and lived under every administration which the United States has ever had up to President Harding. The lives of two men, father and son, practically span the years of our national existence. Nevertheless, in this short space of time nearly every important change in the condition of women educationally, economically and politically, has come.

Our forefathers believed most ardently in a an educated leadership in both church and state and by 1836 had established in their new country, Harvard and later, other colleges. They built up a system of grammar schools where boys were taught in preparation for these colleges, but girls were not even seriously thought of in the scheme of education for them. A few Harvard and Yale boys helped themselves thru college by opening girls' schools during their vacations. Such opportunities, however, were the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, the type of education given to girls was often distinctly superficial. Particularly was this true in the so-called finishing school, popular a little later, and in which girls were "finished" after having had a smattering of French, music and embroidery. Now we have a "commencement" after twelve years preparation and four years college training. These two words, "finished" and "commencement", speak volumes on the opportunities of women in the two periods.

Perhaps the two causes more than any others which tended to bring about a change in the education offered to women were: first, the French revolution which, reacting on the thought of the American people, brought in them a realization that quality of opportunity was due to every individual, and second, to the invention of the steam engine in 1763 which before many years began to revolutionize society by taking from the home to the factory many of its industries. This forced women of the middle and lower classes to seek employment outside of the home and such soon found that more education was necessary to their economic progress. In the upper classes of society, too, many women, after having much of their occupation re-motivated, became restless and dissatisfied. These and other forces working together caused some slow improvements not only in the number of schools, but also in the type of education given. It was not, however, until about 1830 that marked evidences of this betterment became decidedly apparent.

Too much credit cannot be given to Mary Lyon, a poor girl, who, in spite of the lack of free schools and the inferior quality of the few academies available, eventually by her own efforts became a successful teacher. Feeling that the schools in which she studied and the one in which she was teaching were far from meeting the needs of girls of her day, she decided to make one of the right kind. She gathered her savings and her savings driving from village to village interviewing people of means and interesting them in her project of making a school for girls comparable to those for boys, and finally in 1837, having collected four thousand dollars she opened Mt. Holyoke Seminary. Its success was immediate and very soon induced a number of wealthy men to start colleges of high rank for women such as Vassar, Smith and others.

At almost exactly the same time Horace Mann was doing his great work for the public schools of Massachusetts. The leading tenet of his doctrine was that education should be universal and free, that girls should be trained as well as boys and that the poor should have the same opportunities as the rich. It was also thru his efforts in 1833 that the first Normal schools in the United States were established.

In the meantime another movement was helping the women. The great west was being opened up, the population was scattered and it took all the boys and girls in a big territory to justify even a little school. Thus co-education on a large scale got a start and to the surprise of many people it worked exceedingly well. Oberlin in 1833 was the first college to open its doors jointly to men and women, but it was soon followed by many of the state universities, especially in the west.

Women's education received another great impetus at the time of the Civil War. Due to the dearth of men, there were few except women to teach the schools. They proved to be surprisingly good teachers and when the war was over and men were more needed in other occupations they continued in this work. The need of normal schools to help them was met and they have stayed in the field until now it is the leading occupation of college women.

Today more girls than boys are graduating from our high schools, nearly as many women as men from our colleges and the best graduate schools are offering fellowships and scholarships to women on the same terms as to men. The major portion of this remarkable progress has taken place in less than a century.

Our nations also have taken big steps in women's education, but none approaches ours in either the facilities for study or the opportunities for women to make places for themselves after graduation. They can reach the top in almost any profession (providing always that they do their work a little better than their men competitors). These great privileges to the American college woman would not be available if it were not the wish of her fellow countrymen that she should have them and if they had not by heavy taxes paid the bills for her advancement. In return this has put a particular obligation to meet squarely the problem of citizenship in which she now is asked to share. She should not only think thru for herself the right solution

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Winner in Health Contest Attends Ames

The health contest which was one of the main features at the International this year had a very simple beginning in the Home Economics Division of Iowa State College a few years ago. The teachers of several high schools which were to visit the campus asked that exhibits of clothing and food be prepared which the girls might judge. The committee thought that high school girls should also be able to judge the physical well being of girls. The Physical Education Department prepared a score card which was used by the girls and which later was used in Boys and Girls Club Work of the State. Edith Brewer who won the State Health Contest last year, is now a freshman at Ames. Miss Esther Cation of Clay County and James Evans of Des Moines County represented Iowa in the Health contest in Chicago.

The Responsibility of American Women to Citizenship

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of the question in government as they arise, but she should become a leader of other women who have had less chance to study the economic principles on which government rests.

For some reason American women did not take the same interest in political questions before suffrage came as did their sisters in England. There, for many years, women were a real force in every possible way in elections. Speaking in England is not easy, for there the audience holds the right to question the speaker on any statements. No woman can speak under such circumstances unless she knows her subject exceedingly well. (Possibly this method applied to public speakers in our own country might bring to light a few weaknesses in some of our so-called statesmen.)

Walter H. Page said in one of his letters home after he went to the embassy in London, "These English women know their politics as no women among us do." Just a few days ago, one of our graduates was in my office as he returned from a visit to Ottawa, the Canadian capital. He had met at a reception there a number of prominent English and Canadian women and was amazed at their skill in conversation on political questions. Evidently this interest is awakened in the girls while still in college, for when Mary Heald returned from her Y. W. C. A. Conference in Canada last year, she said that when Canadian girls began to talk on economic and political questions, American girls both from the East and West felt it wise to keep quiet.

The nineteenth amendment gave women the right of suffrage and either intelligently or unintelligently women must take their share in making the future policies of the country. Unless women read and study and think along the lines of the big questions which are facing them, the country will not be advanced by the women's vote.

Every one of the public questions at issue now is just as vital to women as to men—for example, the great economic question of getting American agriculture back onto a paying basis. There is no business in the world in which women are more essential than on the farm. They provide good wholesome food for the workers, giving the time of meals to the work of the day, they are largely responsible for the poultry, the dairy and the garden parts of the business which often contribute a considerable portion of their yearly income. The solution of the farmers' problem is not simple, but it must be found. No country ever progresses unless its agriculture is successful. In the past, farmers have not thought enough for themselves. They are vitally interested now and the remedies suggested are legion. Conditions will be made better only if all the people, women as well as men, when they vote on the men and measures connected with this question think things thru to conclusions based on sense, not sentiment.

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Again, are women interested in the right solution of the railroad question? They should be, first because every economic enterprise of the country is more or less connected with it, and second, because it is in the interest of women's welfare. These economic enterprises form a part of every commodity they use. The present prospect that a small railroad in Southern Iowa may cease to operate, causes the inhabitants in a line of towns and the surrounding country to become desperately concerned about their future markets, it is brought home to us that this is a question of vital concern to us all. There are many deep questions involved. Women must decide between candidates who have in mind different solutions of this question. Are they studying into the problem?

These are only two of the national questions at issue. There are many others. Perhaps the greatest strictly American question is—Are we going to enforce our laws? We passed an amendment to our constitution which every one admits has been of great economic and social benefit to our nation. We practically all believe in it, yet we allow some of the lowest types of our citizens to overrule us for their personal gain. Good women can do as much as good men to build up the much needed public sentiment for enforcement; and foolish women, who do not sense their obligations to society, may by word and deed do more harm than wicked men in setting laws at defiance. We claim to be a law-abiding people. When the present prospect that a small railroad in Southern Iowa may cease to operate, causes the inhabitants in a line of towns and the surrounding country to become desperately concerned about their future markets, it is brought home to us that this is a question of vital concern to us all. There are many deep questions involved. Women must decide between candidates who have in mind different solutions of this question. Are they studying into the problem?

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Judge Florence Allen indicates that it is possible for women to become leaders in the great uplifting movements.

It is not, however, the time for undue self-congratulations. There are too few women of Judge Allen's type giving deep and serious consideration to public questions. Women do not reach positions where their opinions have weight until they have served a long apprenticeship of hard and serious work. It matters not whether a woman is in her own home, is a teacher or is a professional woman, unless she throws herself into her work with vim and energy, finds time to continue to grow and also time to contribute something to the community in which she lives, she cannot hope to go far. This often means that the pleasures of the moment must be put aside for the prospects of the future. There are many women with such ideals, but the reputation of all women is often injured by those less serious ones who do their duties in a half-hearted way, as a means of making a living, and always hoping that something or somebody will come along to relieve them of their drudgery.

Only last week I learned that some school boards in Iowa were finding it necessary to ask their teachers to sign contracts in which teachers agree to stay in the town in which they teach at least every other weekend. It is to be hoped that this practice did not originate as a consequence of the attitude of Ames women. A really professional teacher would be there when needed and would want to make her life a force in her community both in and out of school. Only thus can she hope for growth and consequent advancement.

I hope I am not pessimistic, but I sometimes wonder in this age of autos, and bridge and golf and jazz, if the rank and file of people, old or young, men or women, give as much thought to serious matters as their fathers did. These are innocent pleasures, but if they occupy off the leisure of the people, from what source is to come the wisdom of the voters, without which a democracy is bound to fall. It may be that President Coolidge has been called at this time to set us an example of more simple and worthwhile living.

It is to be expected that there will be some among the women who are not equal to their new responsibilities. Men have not always been true to the obligations of citizenship—some have been indifferent—some have used their privileges for selfish aims and to the detriment of society—but always there have been enough earnest, straight thinking men to keep our country ever moving to higher limits. If we are not to retrograde in the future, these new women citizens must produce leaders of thought equal in correctness of judgment to the best of those who have in the past made for national development. Nor should we be satisfied unless we are improving on the work of those past generations. We are no less patriotic citizens, if while we believe we have the best country in the world, we admit that it is possible for it to become infinitely better; and we are more patriotic in proportion to the help we render in bringing about this improvement.

It should then be the aim of all college graduates, men and women, who have received so much from state and nation to work together toward still higher ideals of government than the past has ever known.