Homemaking Challenges An Iowa Stater

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Homemaking

An

Mary Ellen Brown, '38, article reprinted from

WOMEN have almost forgotten that only a few years ago they were demanding the right to vote and an equal chance to participate in business with men. The right to choose any career she desires without considering her sex is taken for granted by every young woman these days.

Many effects have come apparent since the weaker sex proved itself equally strong. Men no longer arise and offer their seats on busses to women. There are more feminine graduates from college. New fields of business and professions have grown up in which women are especially adapted.

The attitude that the great career of homemaking is to be looked down upon is far reaching—affects us all. I became acutely conscious of this attitude when upon my graduation from college I announced my marriage date just two months later. Some of my friends, throwing up their hands, exclaimed, "How can you throw away all your technical training this way? You should work for a year or two at least!"

My major had been journalism and home economics combined and I knew that I would thoroughly enjoy a business position in this line. And yet, I saw no reason why I should not choose to use my education as a homemaker. I thought I could see in the career of homemaking more exciting and inspiring tasks than in any other position.

Why should anyone question my decision? Why has the feeling that homemaking is to be looked down upon arisen?

One cause perhaps is the new type of unmarried women today. In years gone by, these women had only two choices. They could teach school, or they could live with a married brother or sister and help to care for their families. The term "old maid" was a cruel but hard to escape epithet.

Now women have discovered that they fill some business positions even more efficiently than men. They have discovered that they can support themselves ably, dress well, meet men on an equal basis, and converse about subjects which women heretofore were supposed to know nothing about.

While many women have thus been stepping forth in the business and professional world, however, the homemaker has been given innumerable machines to save her time and energy. A picture has been created of Mrs. Homemaker pressing a button or two or twisting a can opener to complete her day's work.

Schools and colleges have rightly held that every student should be prepared to support himself. Therefore, women have been taking courses of study leading directly to a wage-earning position. This is certainly one of the duties of an efficient school system. However, perhaps this direct preparation for a wage-earning life has far too often overshadowed the glory of a career as homemaker and made it seem uninspiring.

I receive letters occasionally from friends of mine who have positions on magazines or newspapers, who are doing experimental foods work in the kitchens of great concerns, who are secretaries of business executives. These letters make me pause a bit as I read of their activities, and think back over my own work.

After all, why do I find so much joy and downright fun in this job? There are many parts of it which are tiresome and dull. Scrubbing floors and washing windows are anything but exciting. Yet they become exciting to me when I look upon them as part of my program for maintaining a clean and attractive home. All of us have tasks which seem distasteful, washing the dishes, ironing or making the beds perhaps.

Such matters as these are only the mechanics of my job. All of us homemakers have this foundation of routine on which to build the "homiest" home that we can.

Home means serviceable fabrics on the furniture so that the children may use it freely. It means doing
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defends homemaking careers in an
Student Home Economist, April, 1941

without the porcelain figures on the coffee table while the babies are toddling around on exploration trips.

Home means good food served attractively, and enough for an extra person or two who drop in.

Home means a wife and mother who looks fresh and neat before breakfast and all through the day.

It means a mother who is not too busy to play with her family, nor too tired to visit with her husband after the children are in bed.

These points which contribute to a home are not easy to attain. When people question my use of technical education as a homemaker, I think of goals such as these which I am trying to reach. I realize that I fall far short on many counts. I realize also, though, that I might find it even harder to do the things I wish without my home economics education as a background.

All through the routine of homemaking the mechanics of running a house are simplified for the home economist, magnified for the untrained woman.

Home economics training makes it easier to choose wisely among the many occupations that vie for our time. All of us could keep busy every day with meetings or bridge parties or sewing clubs. The wisest homemaker selects the activities which will be most stimulating and enjoyable.

Of course, there are many fine homemakers who have never had any formal home economics training.

One of the most delightful homes we visit is a two-room apartment. Its mistress is a young Chinese woman who had servants to perform the smallest task for her when she was growing up in China. Her schooling has taken place entirely in an Eastern finishing school. She is married to a young Chinese student whose salary is small. In her two rooms and tiny kitchen she is a most efficient homemaker.

It is small wonder that women are being termed homemakers rather than housewives these days. The world is realizing anew the activities summed up in that word "homemaker". Here is a career which includes interior decoration, social life, dietetics and meal planning, costume design, first aid, child psychology and adult psychology, too. And all of these things with many others must be combined with the skilled touch of one who loves her job and would never exchange it for another. She is a homemaker.