

WOMAN'S OFFICES AND INFLUENCE.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

MONROE FEMALE SEMINARY,

DELIVERED BY

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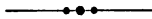
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WOMAN'S OFFICES AND INFLUENCE.



OURS is an age of stirring life, an age of notions and novel-
ties, of invention and enterprise, of steam-motives and tele-
graph-wires. The ocean, for passage, has become a river.
The air a medium for the flight, not only of birds, but
of thoughts. Distance scarce any more lends enchantment
to the view, for 'tis annihilated. The ends of the earth
meet, and the watchmen on her walls see eye to eye.
Even worlds long buried in the deep unknown are now
revealed to human vision, and we almost penetrate the
arcana of our own fair satellite, as she nightly looks down
upon us in her beauty. And man would fain believe, too,
in his wisdom, or his folly, that e'en the rappings of spirits
are heard in this nether planet of ours.

But what of all this? Why, we live in this whirl of
galvanic motion: we breathe this excited atmosphere: we
revolve on this stirring sphere. And, think you, without
feeling aught of its forces?

We have our being, too, amid the busy scenes of a new
world, a free world, a forming world. Our geologic species
is a conglomerate. Whether it shall be of rude, unshapen
masses, or of polished gems, fit not only for the pillars of
this republican edifice, but for its adornment also, will depend
much on the present generation, more on the women of that
generation.

Believing that woman not only takes impressions from the age, but emphatically makes them on it too, I select for my theme **WOMAN'S OFFICES AND INFLUENCE.**

To make home happy is one of the offices of woman. Home, blessed word. Thanks to our Saxon fathers for it. Not the name merely, but the realities it expresses. An English, an American home is a Bethlehem-star in the horizon of earth's sorrows, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

“ There is a magic in that little word :
It is a mystic circle that surrounds
Comforts and virtues never known beyond
The hallowed limit.”

“ The tabernacle of our earthly joys
And sorrows, hopes and fears—this Home of ours
Is it not pleasant ?”

Yes, home is the centre of all that is sweet in the sympathies, dear in the affections of the soul. There the kiss of love is impressed in its purity, the warm pressure of the hand knows no betrayal, the smile of joy plays no deceiver's part. All is candid, cordial, sincere. The faults and failings which belong to humanity fallen, are there covered by the mantle of charity, and the feeling of every member of the family is, “ With all thy faults I love thee still.”

How the traveller climbing Alpine summits, looking forth on the sublime creations of Jehovah, thinks of home, and wishes the loved ones there could share his rapture ! How the wrecked mariner on some desert isle longs for a mother's fond endearment, a sister's kindly care ! Home is in all his thoughts.

It is worth the while, then, to strive to make *home* happy ; to do each his part toward rendering it the spot of all pleasant associations. In the several relations of child, sister, wife, mother, let kindness and cheerfulness reign.

Kindness comes over the spirit like the music of David's harp over the passion of Saul. It softens and subdues. It manifests itself in a thousand nameless forms, but all beautiful. It is a crown of glory on the head of old age, a jewel on the breast of childhood. The light it diffuses is soft, the rays it emits are melting.

“And oh, if those who cluster round
The altar and the hearth,
Have gentle words and loving smiles,
How beautiful is earth.”

Cheerfulness is another attribute of character tending to the happiness of home : and let me commend it to woman's cultivation. Some there are, ever disposed to look on the dark side of life ; and thus they not only becloud their own spirits, but cast a shadow over the smiling precincts of home. Every single sour grape portends a cluster ; every flash of lightning a riving thunderbolt. Earth's actual cares are not enough ; troubles must be borrowed. The present does not fill their heart with sadness ; the future must be laid under contribution.

All this is just the opposite of cheerfulness. That scatters wide over the soil of the household the seeds of many little joys, that the weeds of small vexations may be kept under, and ever and anon the sickle be thrust in and a harvest of good fruits be garnered for daily use. It gazes on the bright side of the picture, and throws its delighted glances upon every eye. And thus it not only augments present bliss, but in hoary years the memory of other days around the family hearth will be sweeter, and the influence on ourselves better.

“Cheerfully to bear thy cross in patient strength is duty.” “Not few nor light are the burdens of life : then load it not with heaviness of spirit ; sickness, and penury, and travail—these be ills enow : the tide is strong against

us: struggle, thou art better for the strife, and the very energy shall hearten thee."

"In thy day of grief let nature weep; leave her alone; the freshet of her sorrow must run off; and sooner will the lake be clear, relieved of turbid floodings. But see, that her license hath a limit."

"For empty fears, the harassings of possible calamity, pray and thou shalt prosper: trust God and tread them down." "The stoutest armor of defence is that which is worn within the bosom, and the weapon which no enemy can parry is a bold and cheerful spirit."

Beautiful in the family is this spirit of cheerfulness; and surely it is an office of woman to cherish it. It can be wooed and won. Wherever woman goes, and especially at home, let it be as a halo of light around her head, and then shall she be a blessing to the circle in which she moves. Despondency is death, cheerfulness life. But remember that levity and boisterous mirth are no essential ingredients of this wholesome cordial. Its chief element is rather that which Paul spake of when he said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Another office of woman is, *to check the utilitarianism, the money-loving spirit of the day*. There is something beside bread and water to be cared for in this probationary world of ours, inhabited by living *spirits*. And yet one is almost compelled to the conclusion that the whole race, at the present day, has given itself up to the worship of Mammon.

That which is a *physical* fact, which is capable of being *used*, is the *summum bonum*. *Cui bono*, in a terrene sense, is the great question. "Will it pay," the grand idea of the age. And men are hurrying along, life in hand, breathless and bootless, over the highways and byways to the Great Mogul's temple, where there is no spiritual Divinity to revere.

We almost wish the return of the old Grecian's faith, who enveloped himself with a spiritual world, and this, at least, elevated his intellect, if it did not renovate his heart. To him the majestic mountain was peopled with august entities. To us it is of no account, if it do not contain in its bowels buried stores of wealth, though it may awaken the feeling of the sublime, and lift the soul up to God. To him the shady tree was the habitation of dryads, the rippling brook of naiads : to us, neither has beauty, unless the one can turn a mill, and the other furnish us fire-wood or lumber.

We have made the soul slave to the body ; have stripped the Universe of its glory, as a reflecting mirror, pouring down upon us such rays of Heaven's brilliancy as our vision can endure. God's sun is only to lighten us on our pathway to business ; His mighty ocean only to bear the burden of our commerce ; His magnificent lakes to carry our trade ; His beautiful hills and smiling vales but to grow our corn, feed our cattle, and be the substratum for our railways.

This utilitarianism of the day, too, has but little sympathy with the fine arts. It laughs at music and painting, poetry and sculpture, as things of naught, although they may tend mightily to the culture of the spirit and the refinement of humanity. Classical learning it discards, because with its dusty eyes it cannot just see how that can qualify man or woman for the better enjoyment of life, or how it will help us plow or measure our fields, grind our grain, or churn our butter.

The mere discipline of the mind, the symmetrical development of man's higher powers, the æsthetic evolution of himself ; all this, though it expand his intellect and enlarge his heart, though it impress on him more of the lineaments of the skies, and bring him nearer to his great Original, is but waste of time and thought, because it falls not with-

in the described circle of the utilitarian. Shades of Bacon and Locke, of Shakspeare and Milton, of Goethe and Schiller, come and alight at least on the daughters of our land !

Here is a wide field of influence for woman. You are the vestal virgins to watch the fires on the altar of the fine arts. Yours it is to check the sensuousness of man, to recall him from his ceaseless toil after the mammon of this life, his restless ambition to turn every thing to account in available funds, in bank-stocks, copper-stocks, railroad-stocks. Tell your sons and your sires that there are higher sources of joy. Point them away from earth's sordid gold to the brighter gems of literature. Direct their energies to the intellectual and moral advancement of their age. Help them to slake their quenchless thirst at the pure fountains of knowledge and religion.

There is a poetry of life worth cultivating. There are spiritual entities around us to which we are linked by ethereal chains. Let us not struggle to throw off those chains, but rather to bind them faster about us. And when you see a link broken, and others likely to drop, mend it.

Woman's office it is also *to soften political asperities in the other sex, and themselves to shun political publicity*. Not that woman need be ignorant of the great questions of the age ; better be familiar with them. But let her not become absorbed in them ; rather keep so aloof from exciting occasions as to be better qualified to form and express a deliberate and unbiased judgment on men and measures. Let her opinions be well matured, and always uttered with calmness and caution. When her dearest friends of the other sex seem embittered toward others, and in danger of forgetting the sweet charities of life amid the chafings of party rivalry, let her pour out the milk of human kindness into the cup of courtesy, and ask them to drink of it. When the waters are troubled and the billows

roar, let her diffuse over them the oil of love to still the waters into a great calm. Surely this is an office higher, better far, than to be pressing on, as some would have her, into the busy bustle of out-door politics. Here is *influence*, and it is better than *power*.

Who that loves woman, that really admires her worth as *woman*, that thinks of her as the delicate, refined, tasteful, sensitive development of humanity, the incarnation of all that is lovely, gentle, modest, peaceful, and pure, the highest earthly manifestation of God as *love*; who that remembers her as the "help-meet," can bear the thought of hurrying her out upon the theatre of politics, the platform of legislation?

"Woman's rights," they cry, and so loud the cry, that even woman's ambition has conquered her judgment and her delicacy, and she has gone forth, out of her appointed and fitting sphere, to be gazed on by a curious crowd, and perhaps to hear the plaudits of a noisy populace. *O tempora! O mores!* Save us from such a race of women!

Now woman has rights, many rights, and let them be well guarded; but she has no right to be a *man*. Yet, no wonder 'tis, if amid the stirring enterprises and new discoveries of the age, some half-amazon should defy the customs of social life, and assume the right of levelling all distinctions between the sexes, walking forth *à la Turk*, and becoming the gazing-stock of the street. Oh, let beautiful, winning woman wear the gracefully-flowing robes of modesty; let her not be met by us "up to the eyes" in politics, nor at the ballot-box, nor the caucus, nor in the legislative hall, nor on the judicial bench, surrounded perchance by tobacco-chewing barristers, nor as the public haranguer, addressing promiscuous multitudes.

Let us rather see her in the quiet retirement of home, not doomed to the busy drudgery of hard housekeeping merely, but there the refined woman, whose pure sensibili-

ties are shocked at the thought of a public notoriety; who shuns the wistful gaze of the crowd, and finds in her own family circle her kingdom and her *rights*, and seeks to adorn that with all that is lovely and of good report. Thus will she win our admiration and secure our love. Were her intellect and her eloquence displayed at the bar or on the platform, we might indeed wonder with deep amazement, but we should not love; and wanting this, both she and we were unhappy.

While sensible, then, of her equality with man in the possession of a soul like his own, capable of the highest enterprises in science and literature, may she yet recognize, as the appointment of her all-wise Creator, subordination to man in power, superordination in influence. Be content to be *woman*. It is a province high enough. If not cherubic, it is seraphic. It is that phase of humanity we think most godlike; for if Jehovah's highest expression of himself is *Love*, then that form of humanity expressing most of it, is most like Him. That form, in our opinion, is woman.

Let her not, then, strip herself of her chief glory, and depart further from her God and Saviour, by shooting out from her own feminine orbit, and aiming to revolve in that of the other sex, under the false impression that it is a higher one. Even if it were, it is not hers, and by thus battling with the order of nature, and swinging loose from the proper relations of her being, she might become a wandering star in the blackness of darkness for ever.

Another evident office of woman is, *to regulate the forms and control the habits of social life*. In this land, especially, do the "lords of creation" bow with due deference to their ladies. We give them our arms, 'tis true, and we ask them to lean upon us, yet do we take step with them, and in turn lean on them, amid the trying times of life, and look to them for many of our joys, for most of

our happiness. He is vulgar, even barbarous, we think, who does not appreciate her worth and respect her character. Hence, every where, hers is the first place, the best place; and an American gentleman would rather suffer an agony than subject woman to a discomfort.

Such being her relative position, hers it must be to prescribe the customs of social life, and say to man, "hitherto shalt thou go and no further." The tone of morals will be such as she makes it. Man will be conformed to the model she exhibits. He seldom, if ever, rises above the level of his female associates. Surround him with the vulgar, the thoughtless, the impure, and you shall not see him pure, thoughtful, refined. Place him ever in the society of intelligent, dignified, Christian women, and their virtues will be reflected on him.

And is it so, that woman is responsible, in a great measure, for the fashions and habits of the community in which she lives? It is even so. If she discard that foolish frippery and passion for display, which occasionally characterize her own sex, it will not long live. It must be buried in its own foibles, and have no resurrection. If she frown upon him who robs woman of her jewel, he is a fugitive on the face of the earth. If she discountenance the use of intoxicating beverages, the young man will learn that abstinence on his part is the price of respect and love on hers. Her office here is magnified: her influence has become a power. The other offices were guiding and directory; this is reformatory. Society looks to her for its type. Its virtues and its vices are of her moulding. *It is what she bids it be.*

What a potency! Let her wield it for her country's welfare. Then shall it be a beacon-light to other lands now in darkness and degradation, because there woman is still the slave of man's passions, and has never risen, under Christianity, to know her dignity, and make her brutal master feel her moral equality in the scale of being.

Only one other office of woman shall we notice at present—*the exemplification and diffusion of Christianity*—of Christianity, not so much in its forms and dogmas, as in its spirit; not solely as a redeeming scheme, but also as a reforming power.

To Christianity woman is emphatically a debtor. It has breathed into her its breath of life, and she has become a living soul. Else had she been but a dead manikin. To it she owes her present advanced position, her commanding influence. Even all the literature and refinement of Greece and Rome could not confer on woman the boon which the religion of Jesus has brought her. He was woman's son, and his religion tells it. Go where that religion is not, and there woman is naught.

Christianity has not only broken down the wall of partition between male and female, but has opened the sealed fountains of her soul, and caused them to send forth rills of gentleness and love, which have refreshed humanity and poured out gladness on a dark and dreary world. Let the cross, then, be woman's standard, Jesus woman's trust, Christianity woman's charter. That thrown overboard, we are wrecked. Its principles abandoned, the world sinks again into barbarism, and woman to brute degradation. "The last at the cross and earliest at the sepulchre," must remember to cling to Christianity as her hope, her life. Let *her* never be ashamed to confess it her ruling principle, her source of joy, nor be hesitant in disseminating its seeds, that she may every where behold its lily-flowers.

Can it ever be well said of woman, "she careth not if there be a God, or a soul, or a time of retribution; pleasure is the idol of her heart: she thirsteth for no purer heaven?" Let such an one be decked in all the gorgeous trappings of wealth, let her brow be crowned with the coronet of rank, let her girdle hold the key which unlocks the treasures of California, and yet she wants that which ennobles her sex,

and would render her an object of love and a source of joy to others.

“ Oh, what is woman, what her smile,
 Her lip of love, her eyes of light,
 What is she, if her lips revile
 The lowly Jesus? Love may write
 His name upon her marble brow,
 And linger in her curls of jet :
 The light spring-flower may scarcely bow
 Beneath her step—and yet—and yet—
 Without that meeker grace she'll be
 A lighter thing than vanity.”

Never, then, let the sneer of the infidel, nor the scorn of the skeptic, drive woman from compounding the spices to embalm her crucified Master, nor make her ashamed to be seen early at his sepulchre. Rather let her glory in the cross, and make the most of her high mission here to send its healing influences to every sick and sorrowing creature on this green earth. Why should any poor, perishing mortal be left in all the degradation of idolatry, when there is in our possession a power that would lift him to heights of bliss, temporal and eternal? Why should the world be left to its wailings and its woes, when Christianity diffused, in its benign spirit, would convert those woes into joys, those wailings into hallelujahs? How can woman, owing her all to the religion of the Bible, refrain from exerting her energies to place this word of life in the hands of every pilgrim over the deserts of time? And may she so breathe its spirit and feel its power, that it shall never again be thus written of her :

“ There came
 A stranger bright and beautiful
 With steps of grace, and eye of flame,
 And tone and look most sweetly blent
 To make her presence eloquent ;
 Oh, then I looked for tears. She stood
 Before the prisoner of Calvary.

I saw the piercing spear—the blood—
 The gall—the writhe of agony.
 I saw his quivering lips in prayer,
 ‘Father, forgive them’—all was there !
 I turned in bitterness of soul,
 And spake of Jesus. I had thought
 Her feelings would refuse control :
 For woman’s heart I knew was fraught
 With gushing sympathies. She gazed
 A moment on it carelessly,
 Then coldly curl’d her lip, and praised
 The high priest’s garment ! Could it be
 That look was meant, dear Lord, for thee !”

A few words on *Influence*. This is woman’s power. That distinctively belongs to man, and is exercised by authority. Law and penalty grow out of it. It regulates actions, it punishes crime. Influence, on the other hand, awakens feeling, generates opinions, implants sentiments in the soul, silently yet emphatically ; and thus it crushes vice, promotes virtue, and avoids the necessity of penal infliction.

Now this is pre-eminently the potent lever in the hands of woman for regenerating and reforming the political and moral world. We may stand in awe, indeed, before the exhibitions of *power*, whether physical or moral, but we are not won by them to the love of truth and goodness, while *influence* steals in upon our hearts, gets hold of the springs of action, and leads us into its own ways. It is the *inflowing* upon others from the nameless traits of character which constitute woman’s idiosyncrasy. Her heart is a great reservoir of love, the water-works of moral influence, from which go out ten thousand tubes, conveying off the ethereal essences of her nature, and diffusing them quietly over the secret chambers of man’s inner being.

Even the weakness of woman softens and subdues, and thus unseals the soul for the infusion of her own sentiments. Her winning smiles, her tender sympathies, her sensible expressions, her gentle ways, all influence us, flow

in upon our spirits. Who can be long boisterous in the presence of a woman? No more can the yeasty waves dash and foam when superinfused by the mollifying touch of oil, than can the passions of man rage with impetuosity in contact with the oleaginous serenity of gentle woman.

Let man, then, exercise power; woman exert influence. By this will she best perform her offices, discharge her duties. Thus will she most effectually make home happy, restrain utilitarianism, allay party asperities, regulate the habits of social life, and both exemplify and diffuse Christianity. Thus she will become *vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre*—"conqueror of the conquerors of earth," and do more to bless the world, and make it truly happy, than all political institutions, fiscal agencies, and merely intellectual educations.

Surely this is a mission exalted. Let no woman despise it, though it exclude her from the senator's seat and the chair of state. Let her rather remember that she honors herself more, glorifies her God better, and elevates her race higher, by adorning the sphere which her very physical organization prescribes. Never will she be improved in her nature, elevated in her influence, happier in her own spirit, or more potent in effecting the happiness of the world, by aiming at the proper dignities of *man*, throwing herself out upon the arena of public life, meddling and mingling in its chafings and chances. Ah no! let us still hope that woman will have good sense enough to discern the wisdom of God in her proper relation, and that man shall still and ever have the privilege and the joy of admiring and loving her as gentle, retiring, delicate, yet influential *woman*.

Young Ladies! allow me a few closing words: A great cloud of witnesses is gazing on you with interest. Your country, your friends, teachers, brothers, sisters, parents, all hope much for you, expect much of you. To your in-

structors it belongs to guide your steps up the ascent of knowledge. Yours it is cheerfully to follow. *Excelsior* is, doubtless, their motto. Let it be yours. Be not weary in well-doing. Although in that part of the path already trodden, you have met with many a stumbling-block ; although, as you look forward, you descry rugged mountains and weary ways, yet they who have gone before and now return to conduct you on, will tell you of many a quiet nook, and silvery lake, and velvety lawn, and flowery path, to regale your senses and refresh your tired spirits, and of a limitless field of beauty, over which your vision shall stretch with great delight when you have reached the summit of the hill.

To some of you, these are parting hours. Your school-girl days are numbered. You have run to the first goal of life, and are about to be crowned with the chaplet of success. With your joy at the results, you yet feel that it is no light thing to say "Good-bye." Good-bye to fingered books, to desks and seats, to shady trees, and flowery walks. Good-bye to the dear companions of the school-room, and, above all, to loved and honored teachers, whose smiles have often lighted our countenances with joy, whose gentle words distilled like dew on our hearts in the moments of despondency. Good-bye to all, good-bye !

Yet the memory of these days will be precious hereafter. And when, in other years, it may be you shall revisit these scenes, and see other eyes fixed with interest on these same instructors, then hoary with age, and hear other voices reciting their lessons ; after the experience of years you will be ready to exclaim—"Well, there are no happier days than these !" True it is, my young friends ; and leaving you to realize it in the future, I too say, Good-bye ! God bless you !

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