

# OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEISURED WOMEN.

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THERE is an immense amount of feminine talent and energy wasted in the world every day. This is not due to the indifference or the laziness of woman, for she is eager to do, to accomplish, to go out into the field of life and achieve for herself and for her kind. But she simply does not know how. One of the most important movements of the day, therefore, is the reawakening of woman, the building her up on a new basis of self-help and work for others. That movement will set loose an amount of energy and talent that will revolutionize our social life. In a recent article, entitled "A Plan for Girls with Nothing to Do," Mrs. Elsie Clews Parsons says:

"Strange to say, there is a large class of persons, exclusive of paupers and criminals, who, during a certain period of their lives at least, seem to be purposely shut out from opportunities for systematic activity of almost every kind. I refer to the large, and I think growing, class of young women who do not marry for a period of from five to ten years after they leave school or college. I refer also, of course, only to those members of the class who are not engaged in wage-earning occupations, or in systematic, although, as a survival of an earlier family system, unpaid domestic labor."

What I have to say concerns all our idle rich women, and does not apply in any way to women whose domestic requirements are so great as to preclude them from activity in other fields. Among the idle rich of to-day are many women whose families have grown up, so that they are largely relieved of household responsibility and occupation. Such women have much time, money and executive ability; but they do not know how to apply them. They only await suggestion, or, better still, good leader-

ship, to devote their powers to effective work. These women, finding their domestic occupation gone, drift quite naturally into club life; and clubs made up of this class are, as a rule, of a useful and beneficent nature.

The question broadly is, Is woman's sphere of usefulness becoming enlarged? Now, while it may not be expanding, still it is adjusting itself more effectively to her various talents. There is no doubt that woman's highest duty is the home, that her influence there is more powerful for the lasting good of mankind than anywhere else. But many women of high intelligence who are not married, or whose children have gone abroad into the world, carrying there the influence of their mothers' training to sweeten and strengthen their own homes, are bound by every law of morality to find a beneficent outlet for their powers. It is absurd to suggest that women who have a talent for music or literature or art should be enslaved by domestic drudgery, while the struggle for the civilization of the world is going on. As a matter of fact, many women with actual genius for household economy are contributing their influence through the press to the building up of artistic and hygienic homes, and thereby elevating the taste and promoting the health of the community. Would the influence of these women be so great if they were obscure in some remote village? A great percentage of the successful writers of the day are women, and their talent is more subtle and no less powerful than that of men. The theory that women are cowardly and capricious is a delusive outgrowth of the egotism of men. It does not require the citing of cases like that of Joan of Arc to refute such an absurd idea. The old saying that peace has its heroes as well as war is exemplified, I believe, almost exclusively in women. I verily believe that if one were to question indiscriminately a thousand men as to where they got their character, almost all of them would say: "My courage and stability came from my mother, my intelligence from my father."

I am not at all concerned with the question whether women are qualified to enter the fields of labor that have been so long preempted by men. Many of our grandest women are doing the work of men in the environment of women. As a matter of fact, the limitations of woman's field of endeavor are almost wholly physical. I refer of course to the ordinary American woman, because in Europe even physical limitations seem to have been

obliterated. I have never been shocked and disgusted at the sight of a woman in this country yoked with a cow to a plough, a sight which, I am told, is common enough in the fields on the continent of Europe. Nor is the American woman available as a trunk-carrier, like her sister of Holland. Our Puritan mothers—no more than our gentle mothers of the South—had no idea of producing a race of purely physical creatures. Every woman of good American family is born with an inherent dignity of sex which nothing can take from her.

The question, then, is not what our women can do, but what they must do. With all the privileges and blessings that are their heritage go commensurate responsibilities. The moral law is just as exacting as the natural law. God had a purpose in planting high-toned and good women in American soil, both North and South. The women of the two sections are as different from each other as day and night, but each is a splendid type in itself. God meant America to be a nation of brains, or He would not have made it a free nation. He demands that those brains shall be used to cultivate themselves and the brains of others. Now the woman of to-day has demonstrated the quality of her talent, courage and endurance. Therefore there is no excuse for her not working. True, she is still far behind man in the matter of executive ability where great enterprises are involved, or as an organizer, but she is overtaking him with rapid strides. Just now, in civic affairs, her courage is perhaps a little in advance of her judgment. Her methods may not be so sophisticated, nor possibly so judicious, as those of her brother; but one is safe in saying that her purposes are infinitely more idealistic than his, and her attitude decidedly less compromising. A man may trade municipal for Presidential votes, thus sacrificing his city for the nation, his domestic welfare for the policy of the party in power. But who ever heard of a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union who would in the slightest degree relax her attitude on the temperance question? I am not referring now to the women who form so-called "patriotic" clubs for the sole purpose of social life and without the slightest sense of the true import of the word "patriotism." The women of the land must learn that there is more real joy in work than in idleness; that eternal happiness is reached through work and sacrifice; that the temporary, butterfly pleasure is the *ignis fatuus* that lures through

the beauty of youth and the strength and wisdom of mature womanhood into the slough of discontented old age.

The Lord bestowed upon American womanhood virtue, beauty, strength, and, in many cases, wealth and time. He expects what? First that the seed of virtue shall be disseminated throughout the race. Beauty is the manifestation of a pure heart and must be retained unsullied, that others may emulate it through purity of heart. It inspires as nothing else can. From strength, the Lord demands effort in the direction of civilization.

God has put woman with these tools into His vineyard and commanded her to work.

In the first place, she must kill the weeds and prepare the soil. Among the weeds to be found in this particular vineyard, the hardest and most tenacious is selfishness, the result of teaching our leisure girls that they not only need not do for others, but not even for themselves. When a woman has nothing to do but receive the attentions and flatteries of others, she becomes selfish in the same proportion that another woman who works and sacrifices herself for others becomes unselfish. She becomes narrower, less mental, less moral, less idealistic, less useful, and more discontented in the same proportion that the other expands and develops towards higher character. Both of these processes are in obedience to the same law, the operation of which is quite obvious. The tragedy of it all is that the selfish woman is unconscious of her retrogression. She is hypnotized into depraved tastes by the example of those whom she has been taught to regard as paragons of good social form, which should have its basis in morality. There is great danger there for the young girl. The steps by which she may descend are short and the incline gradual. There are no sharp breaks to shock her into a realization of where she is going.

The importance of example to the young cannot be overestimated. The home atmosphere must be pure, if you would have pure children. While the act is but the manifestation of a mental condition, conversely there is grave and undoubted danger that it may by suggestion produce the same mental condition in others. The home atmosphere has been responsible for the continued integrity of the republic of the United States of America. While our great men have not come, as a rule, from the more aristocratic and exclusive circles, neither have they come from

the slums. It is from an atmosphere untainted with the licentiousness of the one extreme or the moral filth of the other that the enduring virtue of American manhood and womanhood has sprung. As the perfect flower requires shade no less than sunshine, so perfect womanhood requires work no less than the brilliancy of social life for its perfect development. All sun or all cellar produces no perfect flower. There is an old and astoundingly fallacious theory that, to make a boy temperate, one should acquaint him with the taste and use of wine at the home table. I have never known this idea to be carried out without disastrous results. One might as well try to make a boy honest by putting him into a school of pickpockets.

When I was young, the idea of a girl smoking a cigarette or drinking a glass of wine was preposterous. Even men were not in the habit of smoking in the society of reputable women. Not long ago, I attended a dinner where there were as many women diners as there were men. Just before speech-making began, it was put to a vote whether or not smoking should be indulged in during that part of the dinner. The ladies present, not wishing to be obnoxious, voted "Yes," I being the only one that voted "No." The result was that the men indulged their love for tobacco to the discomfort of almost all the women present and the nausea of some of them. This sort of thing is remotely responsible for the cigarette-smoking habit among reputable young women. They indulge in order to affiliate with young men and be considered "good fellows."

Drinking is indulged in to an appalling extent by women of the wealthy idle class, and their daughters are following in their footsteps. The great danger of this is that the idle rich class influences the succeeding strata of society. This class is surrounded with a certain glamour that those not so high up in the so-called "social scale" mistake for something genuine, but which is the veriest sham. Bear in mind that I refer to no set or clique, but to a condition manifested in all parts of the country. Now, the persons of this class are widely imitated. If they drink it is considered smart to do so, and others follow suit. If they smoke cigarettes, other girls do the same.

Gambling is one of the inevitable concomitants of idle, extravagant life. Not only is this due to the fascination of the game, but too often to the necessity of winning money to support

such an existence. Here are some instances: A gentleman I know was invited to dine at a fashionable country house. After dinner, he was about to leave for town, when the hostess invited him to a game of Poker. He declined at first, but on her insistence finally acquiesced. Chips were handed about in stacks to the players, and the game proceeded. Finally, the gentleman referred to found it imperative to retire from the game, in order to catch the last train. The hostess followed him into the hall, and quietly informed him that he owed her for the chips with which she as banker had supplied him, and which he had lost in the game. He protested that he had had no idea that they were playing for actual money. The hostess rejoined that that was out of the question, as it was always understood that chips meant money. "I'll give you my check now, or send you the money to-morrow from town," said the gentleman. "No," said the hostess, "you must pay up before you leave this house"; and, rather than make a scene, he called one of the gentlemen aside and borrowed the money to make good his losses.

The trouble is that the wives of many men in this class squander in gambling and other forms of dissipation the money their husbands give them for household expenses, and are compelled to resort to just such measures to make up the deficit, lest their husbands find out the true state of affairs and adopt drastic measures to correct them. Here is an instance of the meretricious extremes to which some persons resort to recoup their losses: A charming young girl whom I know was induced frequently by two young ladies to play Bridge Whist. She did not realize that she was gambling, until she was told by the mother of the young ladies that she was in debt to the extent of \$600. "Why," she cried, "what can I do? My people would be outraged if they knew I'd been gambling!" "That doesn't matter," was the reply; "it is a debt of honor and must be paid—somehow."

An old friend of mine who regularly visits Palm Beach said that the gambling habit obtains among the young lady visitors there to a scandalous extent. She was astounded, she said, at the way in which they would come into the rooms specially fitted up and set apart for the purpose, and, taking off their gloves, settle themselves at the tables for long and serious play.

A clergyman told me the other day that Lent was no longer a season of fasting, but one of Bridge Whist and Euchre.

Week-end parties have Bridge Whist as a sole purpose. Rooms are hired and furnished, in all parts of New York city, by fashionable young women who do nothing but gamble there. I was sitting in my carriage not long ago, and, seeing a young friend of whom I am fond walking up the Avenue, I invited her to drive with me. But she waved her hand, and exclaimed, "I can't to-day. I've been losing at Euchre, and now I'm going to make it up at Bridge," and she hurried on.

The vices that I have mentioned are the weeds growing up in the garden of American womanhood that strangle and dwarf the flower. They spring from the seeds of selfishness and flourish in the soil of idleness. They are directly incompatible with the development of beneficence and self-sacrifice.

The American woman did not inherit vices from her ancestors. They are direct imitations and importations, and there is danger of their tainting the whole social mass. So, as a matter of fact, missionaries are needed among the idle rich more than in any other class. It is here the weeding-out process must be carried out. This work belongs to a certain class who must make virtue fashionable in their own set. Many women are awakening to the necessity of this, and with them rests the salvation of woman.

Queen Victoria set her face inflexibly against any breach of the moral code and did more for English civilization than any statesman or scholar. President Roosevelt is setting the pace of higher life and decent living.

It is just as easy to make good the fashion as bad. When Mr. Gladstone was urging Parliament to adopt measures for the establishment of the Post-Office Savings-Bank, he was jeered at. A friend said to him: "Why, these colliers and draymen and all that class of men spend their nights and their money in the public houses, like their fathers before them. You can't change that traditional habit." "It's just as easy to make virtue fashionable as it is to make vice fashionable," replied the optimistic Mr. Gladstone. "These people must be taught the habit of saving instead of spending." The Postal System was adopted, and some ten years ago there were many millions of pounds sterling on deposit with the Government to the credit of the masses. Now, when you reflect that that vast sum had been diverted from the public house, that it represented a transmutation of vice into virtue, its true significance may be grasped.

The idle rich are no more vicious than the idle poor, but they are much more lacking in sympathy with one another. A rich woman is not different from a poor woman except in the matter of money, and one of the greatest barriers to her usefulness as a missionary among her less fortunate sisters is her failure to realize this truth. One should remember that in America what is called "blue blood" is distributed through both classes—with a preponderance of it, perhaps, among the unmoneyed class.

Woman has advanced greatly, not so much mentally as towards emancipation, in the last twenty years. This emancipation has thrust upon her responsibilities which demand superior mental equipment. Twenty-one years ago, I did not think that women were qualified for suffrage; but the strides they have made since then in the acquirement of business methods, in the management of their affairs, in the effective interest they have evinced in civic matters, and the way in which they have mastered parliamentary methods, have convinced me that they are eminently fitted to do men's work in all purely intellectual fields. When I was a girl, the schools for young ladies in America taught deportment, crocheting, French, music and what might be called the gentler arts. But now they teach higher mathematics. Woman is entering the domain of high professionalism, and her mind is expanding accordingly. When I first acted as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Woman's Hospital, there were twelve women and thirteen men on the Board. The male portion of the Board was made up of lawyers mainly, and at Board meetings the women were outargued by them, and voted as they did.

The field of labor for the women of the idle class is vast. There is no village so small, no town so free from corruption that it does not afford ample opportunity for missionary work. Every woman can make her village or town better. She can form a "sunshine club," the individual rays of which may penetrate and cheer the sick chamber or render the abode of poverty less desolate. Her excuse for interesting herself in civic affairs is that her husband has paid taxes or rent, which is the same thing; and it is just as much her duty to see that he receives full value for his money as it is to see that the butcher does not cheat him. She must see to it that the village is properly policed, so that her daughter may be protected from ruffianism, or that her son may be guarded from evils that lurk in the dark. Her husband has



paid for good sanitary conditions, and she must see to it that the money appropriated for that purpose is properly expended, so that the health of her family may be secured against infection.

The tender-heartedness of woman will naturally lead her to use her influence in bringing about a humane treatment of animals. Taking as her example King Edward and Queen Alexandra and our own President Roosevelt, she should set her face against the docking of horses. Yet is she almost solely responsible for the equally barbarous fashion of wearing for her adornment the plumage of small birds. This cruel practice she should unhesitatingly abolish.

It is impossible to classify the talents of women, to differentiate their quality from that of the talents of men. But there are fields of work that have formerly been preempted by men which I think obviously belong to women. Among them is preeminently the protection of the home. American mothers must guard their offspring against the debilitating effects of the poisoned milk that is literally flooding the country. If a woman cannot do anything else, let her be a milk-inspector. If she lives on the farm, let her see to it that her husband sells pure milk; if she lives in the city, let her see to it that the milkman does not put his cans of milk in or near infected quarters.

In our great cities many women are necessarily lonely or are forced into vicious society. And this loneliness is not ameliorated by attending balls and other entertainments. It is unfortunate that men of small means, having to attend business, must leave their wives much alone in hotels and boarding-houses. It is not woman's nature to be philosophically resigned to solitude. She must have society, preferably good, but she must have society. An inexperienced man is apt to neglect his wife and still expect her to be as chaste as Lucrece. There is a great field for work among the unemployed wives of salaried men. If the idle rich woman would only learn to look upon her sister of this class as the daughter of a woman like herself, coequal with her before God, she would take her by the hand and draw her out from her solitude, and by so doing reap a reward in the unfolding of her own character.

One cannot but regard the wonderful work of the Salvation Army in the reclamation of fallen women as a direct refutation of the contention of sociologists in certain European countries

that vice is necessary, and of the inevitable and horrible deduction that we must permit our sisters to lie where they have fallen. That may do very well for Europe, but we Americans stoutly deny that vice is in the slightest degree necessary to civilization. We point with pride to the result of the inflexible rule of the Puritans. Occasionally, there comes to one the astoundingly idiotic suggestion of the licensing of a certain form of vice as a sanitary measure. Imagine American mothers teaching their sons the Lord's Prayer, and then sending them to the Legislature to make laws for licensing the sacrifice of the purity and happiness of their sisters. No: sanitary conditions come from within; they spring from the moral nature of man. I may be charged with idealism. If so, I acknowledge the compliment. But I am also intensely practical. I believe in striking at the root of evil. Woman must be rigid, uncompromising in her attitude towards vice. No great movement ever succeeded that evinced the slightest moral laxity.

In reading a little book called "*Precipices*," a sketch of Salvation Army social work, one is astounded and inspired by the courage, the kindness, the indomitable perseverance of the uniformed sister in reclaiming fallen women, and by the illimitable patience with which she keeps on reclaiming them as they fall again and again, until the cure is permanent. And a consideration of the abuse that the rescuing sister suffers, the appalling degradation which confronts her in her efforts, compels a recognition of the fact that no other motive than the divine sense of duty could sustain her through the ordeal.

The only remedy for the social evil in any Anglo-Saxon country is apparently in the education of the children—boys and girls. This teaching must be candid, drastic. Half of the difficulty attending it comes from a very natural, but very cowardly, sense of delicacy about discussing such topics. One should remember that any subject can be discussed with dignity by a lady.

Woman has brains, energy and courage, and no one has any moral right to waste time. Time is the most precious thing in the world, because it is the only thing that cannot be replaced when lost. Woman is responsible in proportion to the wealth and time at her command. While one woman is working for bread and butter, the other must devote her time to the amelioration of the condition of her laboring sister. This is the moral law.

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