
The Higher Education of Women vs. Marriage

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In the *Popular Science Monthly* for March 1890, we find an exceedingly well written paper, captioned "The Mission of Educated Women," written by Mrs. M. F. Armstrong.

In the paper prominence is given to certain propositions which to our mind are of startling significance, and well calculated to challenge the most serious reflection — and this view of the subject, as presented by Mrs. Armstrong, is all the more grave and weighty because "educated women" are specially involved.

The paper in question is in reply to an article entitled "Plain Words on the Woman Question," by a Mr. Allen, in which he classifies certain women as "deplorable accidents," and we are left to infer that these "deplorable accidents," in Mr. Allen's opinion, are "educated women," who choose single blessedness rather than run the risks of matrimonial entanglements: in other words, they are educated women, who are self-reliant, and prefer making their own living rather than be dependent upon husbands, and this view of the matter is warranted not only by Mrs. Armstrong's averments and admissions, but by educated women themselves, who, when interrogated, had the courage to respond without circumlocution.

We do not remember to have seen in print anything relating to the "Mission of Educated Women" better calculated to arouse discussion than is found in Mrs. Armstrong's dissertation — in fact, we doubt if hitherto the position has been taken that women of high educational attainments are more disposed than their sisters who have drunk less deeply at the "Pierian Spring," to oppose marriage.¹ To en-

¹ The Pierian Spring figured in Greek mythology as a sacred fountain of knowledge.

able the reader to have a correct view of the situation as presented by Mrs. Armstrong, we quote as follows:

I have been for years connected with a large educational institution, where young men and women are working, side by side, under identically similar influences. The officials and teachers in this school are largely women, and women who, to quote Mr. Allen, have become "traitors to their sex," in that they have taken upon their shoulders the burden of their own support. They are, with few exceptions highly educated, many of them college-bred, three among them being regular physicians, while all of them, if I may be permitted to judge, are of at least average attractiveness. As to health, social position, and previous condition, they offer, also. I believe, a fair average, while their intellectual standard ranks them high in the scale of feminine development.

In this we observe nothing unusual. There is no extravagance of language. People at all acquainted with the educational institutions of the country will at once accept Mrs. Armstrong's description as entirely free from exaggeration. The picture of women educators is perfect so far as it goes, and is conclusive, but had the writer so desired, she could have introduced many embellishments without injustice to her subject. Manifestly, what she says of the teachers of the institution to which she refers, is to introduce a "charming cottage" where "two" of these teachers reside, and where she had the good fortune to meet a "striking assemblage of single women, well looking, well dressed, ranging from 20 to 50 years of age, every one of whom could have, in the past, married, or could still marry, were it her desire to do so." These women were not fanatics; on the contrary, "they were sensible, earnest, in some cases brilliant women, who had, with more or less intention, turned their backs upon marriage, and had chosen instead lives of self-supporting independence." And it is admitted that these women "turned their backs upon marriage" because of their "higher education."

These educated women did not hesitate to furnish Mrs. Armstrong reasons for their choice when confronted with the straightforward request to "tell me why, as representative individuals, you have not married, do not marry, and are endeavoring, so far as educational methods can do it, to perpetuate your type?"

Mrs. Armstrong gives the answers of these educated women to her important interrogatory, and she says "there were no evasions."

The general reader, or the intelligent reader, will feel a lively interest in the replies, because, whether wise or otherwise, they relate to problems of immediate and far-reaching consequences. They involve the laws of the physical, intellectual and moral organism of men and women; God's first command, "Multiply and replenish the earth;"² they involve home and all domestic relations; in a word, if the "higher education" of women is to result in their "turning their backs upon marriage," then the world will be forced, inevitably, to regard this "higher education" of women as the most stupendous evil that has visited the world since the deluge.

It will not do to suggest that a comparatively few will receive this "higher education," and therefore that the number who will "turn their backs upon marriage" will be limited. That is not the question, but rather, does the education of women tend in that direction? It is confessed that such is the influence.

We confess to no little interest in the testimony of the witnesses Mrs. Armstrong introduces in justification of their "turning their backs upon marriage." In one case, a denial is made that education "unsexes" women. It is needless to say that, in one sense, that is impossible — the term relates to masculine prerogatives, not as the result of human statutes, man's ignorance or arrogance, but of the irrevocable laws of his being, and in these laws are blended the animal propensities, the moral sentiments and the intellectual powers. It is not required to discuss "spheres," functions, vocations, and a' that; and yet, as between men and women, orbits are thought to be sharply defined, and when women stray beyond their sphere, they are said to be "masculine," just as when degenerate savages excite the contempt of the "braves," and are known as "squaw men." Educated women are quick to discern when masculines become "squaw men," and in every instance such weaklings excite their unmitigated contempt. If a man is a man, he will be at all seasons in the right place, like a planet. He will not violate the laws of his being to become feminine. There will be something masculine, robust, strong in his tenderness, in his gentlest moods; something manly, when he kneels at the shrine of love or beauty — or, if there is not, his weakness will be detected by women, and by them he will be assigned his proper place in the ranks. And

² Reference to *Genesis*, chapter 1, verse 28, which reads: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

what is true of men, is quite as true of women, and no special pleadings will to any considerable extent change verdicts. It is proposed by highly educated women to change somewhat the program. Says one: "In the past, it is the emotional nature of women which has been cultivated, often at a heavy cost. Now, her intellect is taking charge and this thing of being "sacrificed to emotions" is to cease. The witness asks, can it be shown that the training of her intellect makes a woman any less capable of love and devotion? And yet this very witness claims for the higher education of women the triumph of the intellect over her "emotional nature," the result of which is to prompt her to "turn her back upon marriage." And that such is the outcome of this "higher education" for women is placed beyond controversy by the testimony of "a newly graduated collegian," who said "that in our college it has become a proverb, that if a girl isn't engaged before she is a sophomore, the chances are all against her marriage." And said another highly educated woman: "We become more interested in our studies, more certain of our ability to take care of ourselves, and therefore less interested in men as possible lovers, and more independent of them as a means of support."

In view of all the facts, as stated in Mrs. Armstrong's paper, the mission of educated women is to renounce marriage, home, domesticity, and, in so far as they can influence affairs, annul the command to "multiply and replenish the earth."

Allusions to the fact that husbands are "not infrequently ready to accept assistance from the hands of the women they have undertaken to support;" to "domestic drudgery;" to marrying for "the sake of a somewhat uncertain support;" and to the fact that "the moral sense is in" educated women "more highly developed" than in men; and that they "are morally upon a higher level than men;" go to prove that woman's higher education tends directly to create an antipathy to marriage, a dislike of man, and a low estimate of what is required to establish a home.

It is from such points of observation that thoughtful people are required to contemplate the higher education of women, and the influence such teachings is to have upon women whose educational advantages have been more circumscribed. The opportunities for women to obtain an academic and collegiate education are everywhere increasing. Academies and colleges are multiplying and a vast army of young women are demanding admittance. And it is in testimony — "if a girl is not engaged before she is a sophomore, the

chances are all against her marriage;" she is pretty certain to "turn her back upon marriage." As a result, those who are to marry and establish homes, are to be in the future the comparatively illiterate.

We are inclined to the opinion that those who have been foremost in the advocacy of the "higher education of women," never dreamed that such results would follow, and in contemplating the outcome, so far as indicated by Mrs. Armstrong's paper on "The Mission of Educated Women," they are likely to be greatly perturbed as to further developments.

It will not be denied that women; whether highly educated, moderately educated, or not educated at all, have a right to "turn their backs upon marriage," Nor has anyone a right to change their decision. They have a right to estimate men by such standards as they may select. Such propositions are not involved in this discussion. The real point at issue is, does the higher education of women militate against marriage? and if so, is it a blessing to society? It is this thing called "higher education" that is arraigned. What must be the educational influences of a college, when "if a girl is not engaged before she is a sophomore, the chances are all against her marriage"? To discuss such questions would require more time and space than we have at our command, but they are vital, and eminently worthy of the attention of professional educators.

It is, in conclusion, worthy of remark that in proportion as men become educated, as their animal propensities are restrained, their grossness subdued and their intellectual powers and moral sentiments are brought into harmonious relations, women have been emancipated from the enthrallments of ignorance, brutality, and superstition, the home beautified and glorified steadily and hopefully; but it is in proof that as women become educated, as they advance in intellectual culture and power, they "turn their backs upon marriage," and of a consequence upon home, since there can be no home without marriage, and in this way reverse the social order, and, in fact, the Heaven-ordained order. If this is to be the result of "the higher education of women," their mission is not such as to command approval of this so-called "higher education."

Edited by Tim Davenport

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