

Why Don't Women Read?

A young husband and wife, with their only child, have recently come into a modest, but quite well to do, industrial and desirous of standing well in the community. She is kind-hearted, agreeable, and fond of him and her child; but is constantly complaining of being lonesome, and feels obliged to spend the afternoon with some acquaintances, and laments, when the little round is completed, that she has no other places to visit.

"Why not spend your leisure in reading?" "Oh, I am not fond of it," she answered. "I read stories sometimes."

Yesterday, a pretty little wife visited us. Her husband is thoroughly cultured, and a fine scholar and scientist. She has leisure, and enough for all life's needs.

"What a grand opportunity you have for self-improvement," we said to her. "Oh, yes! my husband wishes that I would read more, but I am not fond of it!" And the young wife lives on, willingly and willfully his inferior; no more fitted to be his companion than the coming years than the sloth is fitted for the antelope.

And these are not, unfortunately, two exceptional cases. The world has hosts of them, and why? Surely not because woman is inferior to man in mind. This might have been the prevalent opinion a century ago, but her entrance into many of the best colleges of the land after equal examinations with young men, the various prizes she has taken in high schools and colleges, where her success in medicine, science, literature, theology even, saying nothing of her attainments in the ceaseless struggles for money in America, which men call business—all these prove that God has given her powers quite equal to any of his creatures, and the use depends upon herself and the society which she permits to mould her; which, alas! fills her hands and brain with frivolities, instead of things which tend to higher womanhood.

Elizabeth Blackwell, Mary Somerville, George Eliot, Sarah Smiley, and a host of others, have opened the doors so wide for woman that she may enter if she will. She is no longer, as in the beginning of this century, to be believed that to "read, write, and cipher" are enough accomplishments for a woman. She is no longer told that she must not be interested in the affairs of government, because it is work enough to adorn her precious body. The church is saying to her as it never said before, "There is a robing of righteousness more comely for a beautiful woman even than gold, or pearls, or costly array."

The world is beginning to learn what Napoleon knew—that ignorant mothers never can train and develop their male and female children. "Educate a woman and you educate a race," has been drilled into the brain of the nineteenth century. Truly, says Victor Hugo, "Man was the problem of the eighteenth century; woman of the nineteenth." Is there no greater question before the civilized world to-day than this: "What type of woman will we have in America's great future?"

There are mighty matters looming up. Catholicism is mightily asserting its hold in all the Catholic churches throughout there by women; when this church holds in its hands its schools and all its benevolent associations, and makes woman a teacher in all that marvelous organized institution, save the one of public mind. It is not the fact that what kind of Protestant women shall we have to meet the on-coming of the hosts of Rome? Trained as are their women in missionary work and devotion, accustomed to transact business and bear responsibility, they are ready for duty calls, rather than left to drift into the glittering whirlpool of society and fashion, is it strange they are a power? Politicians may make it a party cry, the press may echo it, but the Protestant women will have a most important part to act in this Catholic movement.

How can they act their part unless they read? How train their children, how counsel their husbands, how help make public opinion? A man with a frivolous and inefficient wife is like a boat rowed against the tide. He only makes half the man he might have been, and goes heavily freighted with his burden, when he ought to have had a hand at the helm.

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