THE AMERICAN WOMAN TAKES AN INVENTORY

The end of a period, whether it be a year, a decade, a century, calls for balancing of accounts. How much of what we set out to do have we done, we ask. The American woman for example has been very busy in the last few months polling her gains and losses in two particular periods:— The first — the twenty years since the granting of suffrage; the second — the hundred years, roughly speaking, since she set out consciously and with determination to secure for herself a free entrance into what she called "the man's world", a free entrance with training and use of all his tools.

The outcome of this balancing of her budget gives two striking results:— First, the enormous numerical strides that women have made in the rank and file of all of man's activities; Second, the numerically poor showing that she makes at the top of these activities, the points of creative leadership. It should be said at once, however, that if the number at the top are relatively few there are enough of them to prove woman's ability to go where she wants to go.
Consider what women have done. Take the world of arts and sciences by comparing what they are doing there today with what they were doing when they first accounced their program of rights. One finds authoritative material for comparison in Dr. E. F. Fish's "The Rise of the Common Man", an analysis of American life from 1830 to 1850, the period of the rise of the women's rights movement. Dr. Fish reviews among other things the status of American art, science and literature and tabulates the leading figures. He mentions no woman painter. He finds no woman worthy to name in sculpture or in music.

In his tabulation of scientists he does recognize Maria Mitchell; in literature Margaret Fuller Cossoli.

When it comes to leaders in reforms a much more impressive case is made out for women. A fine list of names - Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, Lydia Signourney, Dorothea Lynde Dix.

Compare this showing, even if it were stretched as it well might be, with what the hundred years have brought. List the women who today are active in art, science and literature and you have literally thousands of names - some of distinguished achievement. Sculpture was not supposed to be woman's field, but eight years ago when the Field Museum of Chicago sought a group of sculptors to make a series of studies of the types of men now inhabiting the globe the choice fell on a woman - Malvina Hoffman - not for a part but for the whole. Malvina Hoffman is but one of a group of distinguished women sculptors.
When we come to a painting her one man shows utmost increasing attention on the Avenue. One of the really great mural painters of the day is a woman - Hildreth Meière. One of our most distinguished portrait painters is a woman - Cecelia Beaux.

A reviewer of a hundred years from now doing what Dr. Fish did for the field of literature between 1830 and 1850 even preserving his proportions of women to men would have a hard time in selecting, and he would have to have a big book to report his findings. Not going outside of the present decade you find Dr. William Lyon Phelps awarding the highest praise in his list of books he has liked in the last year to a woman - Mary Ellen Chase. If there is any satisfaction it is a woman who has produced the best seller of our times, a compelling piece of writing - Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind." It was an American woman who last year received the Nobel prize for literature - Pearl Buck.

As for scholarly contributions women are making them almost daily - good writing - honest investigation - real contributions to our knowledge of our country and what has been done in its brief career. No one can write American history any more in any department if he does it thoroughly without using the investigations of American women.
In the field of journalism two of the wisest and most influential of the present race of editorial commentators are women - Dorothy Thompson and Anne O'Hara McCormick.

In the field of business including selling, clerking and clerical work, they have made spectacular increase, planting themselves firmly in finance, management, administration, merchandising, distribution, but it is in the rank and file not at the top that this striking growth has been made. This is true in spite of the fact that women have reached all sorts of advanced posts in the business army in larger numbers probably than in any other field. This is to be expected since they bring to the new system of production a traditional training in executive work.

Under the old order the great majority of women managed big or little households, some of them very big indeed. Housekeeping was conducted on principles very like those of modern business. An inherited executive quality shows itself frequently when a woman takes hold of a job the public believed only men could handle. The newspapers recently tell of a woman chosen over several male competitors to be a buyer for a big industrial combination. Promptly and without noise she brought in an order running into six figures.

This lady said flatly, however, that the opportunity to place big orders was not what she wanted of life, she was willing
to do this only until she had earned enough to get a comfortable house in the country, then she would never have anything more to do with business.

In the world of politics there is a still more striking disparity between the gains at the bottom and the top. When the 19th Amendment was declared ratified on August 26th, 1920, a great body of women felt genuinely that they would lead in creating a new world. One of my ardent suffrage friends told
me how she went home after a midnight jubilation over the
ratification and wakened her husband declaring, "The
millennium has come." Today this same woman is completely disillusioned
and it is quite useless to argue with her that it takes time to
bring a great undertaking to fruition.

This disappointment is not due to lack of
interest in the ballot. Women the country over do vote,
almost as freely as men do, but rarely does the women's vote
change a result. Women have proved conservative and regular.
The great mass who decide the issue choose from the candidates
in the two major folds. That is, they vote as men do.
Nor have women contributed the fresh creative impulse expected.
They have proved, too, that woman as a mass are not more
righteous than men.

The result is not because they have been kept
out of office. Figure that it is only twenty years since the
ballot was open and they were admitted into the political
machines they have been generously treated in the matter of
office. We have them in the United States Senate and House
of Representatives; we have them in diplomatic service; we have
them in both, if not all the State Legislatures - all sorts of
lesser positions. They are represented on every National and
State and local council. And finally we have by appointment
a woman in the Cabinet - Madam Secretary Frances Perkins;
six years now in the most difficult cabinet position, as it
turned out Mr. Roosevelt had on his list.

It ought to be a satisfaction to women interested
in the political side of the movement that Madam Secretary
Perkins received her appointment because she was fitted by
experience to deal with labor situations. This is much more
than can be said for the majority of men who make up a
Presidential Cabinet. Skilled as they may be in general
affairs they have no special knowledge of the materials in their
portfolio, and some of them it must be said never look very
thoroughly into that portfolio. They turn that over to
assistants and under-secretaries. But Madam Secretary of
Labor did know her job.

Moreover, she has kept her head in the bitter-
est and most widespread organized labor war that has ever
ravaged the industrial life of this country. The Department
of Labor was geared to arbitration in case of trouble, but the
machinery was swept aside by the hasty arrogant hands of rival
labor leaders. Unhappily the administration did not, as it
had the right, apply a firm disciplinary hand, insisting on
negotiation while industry went on, as the only civilized way
of dealing with industrial trouble inside a Democratic state.
Madam Secretary Perkins' great achievement under these
circumstances has been to keep her head, control her tongue.
No cabinet head when his Department was under fire has made
as few breaks as the Secretary of Labor.
Women have penetrated every department of
government service. Of the four million in that service
at least a million are women. Mayor La Guardia recently
said that as efficient servants as the city had were women
and he only wished there were more of them around.

Women may have penetrated everywhere but they
are not holding in the second decade since the granting of
suffrage the top position they won in the first. Ten years
ago according to the National League of Women Voters there
were nine women in Congress, today there are five. There
is a falling off, too, in the number of women in State
Legislatures. Can it be that women themselves are discovering
that this is now what they want?

The sorriest disappointment in woman's public
life has been her seeming impotence in strangling wars. Go
back to 1919 and in all the plans for permanent peace the part
women would play stands out. The suffrage was given her in
England and in the United States so promptly after the war,
largely because she had cooperated so finely with men in
carrying it on. Great numbers of men declared, "give woman
the tools and she will put an end to war." She complacently
thought so herself. And now, twenty years after, see what
we have.
The brilliant numerical showing in the rank and file, the comparatively poor numerical showing at the top, the indifference to the top which great masses of the rank and file show, the failure when they have reached the top in politics particularly, to make a creative contribution is causing not a few women who have proved themselves equal of any man in their various fields to doubt the importance of the emancipation women have achieved, to ask if it is what it was cracked up to be.

A forthright challenge came a few months ago from one of the most distinguished of our women writers, honored not only for her
artistry but for the integrity and the fearlessness of her mind and character - Pearl Buck. It is a challenge which does not down, nor will it. Mrs. Buck sees us with a fresh eye. An American reared in China she had accepted as reality idealistic notions of women's place in the United States. They were educated, free, not subjected to their husbands, led their own lives, did things.

Since her return to America Mrs. Buck has given herself every chance to test our freedom, to measure our advancement. In a recent magazine article under the scornful title, "America's Mediaeval Women" she records her discouragement with what she finds. She contends that our education is getting us nowhere. However good we prove in business or in the arts and professions we are not taken seriously, not respected for our work. Only a shockingly low percentage of us are finding places in spite of all the talk about equality of opportunity, having a man's chance.

Pearl Buck places blame for these results squarely on man. He does not want educated women about, he tolerates them but does not marry them. Like Talleyrand he wants a head on his pillow not concerned with the affairs of Europe and the great majority of women back him up. What they want, Mrs. Buck claims, is not equality, but privilege.
This indictment of man as the real stick in
the wheel of feminine progress has backing from many observ-
ing women. They know that boiled down men as a rule prefer
not to have women mixed up at the top with their business and
professional affairs.

I often hear men claim that women create
special problems in an organization. A large firm which in
the past I knew to have given women every opportunity has
recently determined to weed them out of the offices as fast
as possible. Their explanation is that women gossip, flirt,
intrigue. In the interest of peace and efficiency the manage-
ment decided there was nothing to do but to cull out the women
contingent.
Not only do men prefer not to have women working at their side but it is charged generally that in competitive fields men are unfair in measuring achievement - rewarding merit - opening opportunities.

Again and again I hear women painters complain that in mixed exhibitions a masculine jury will throw out pictures by women, that men art critics ignore women's works or give it the damning qualification "for a woman."

In the academic world it is charged that women cannot advance according to their scholarship and their teaching ability. Rarely are they chosen to head a college department, rarely is a woman placed on the faculty of a men's college. There is no such thing as proportional representation on faculties of coeducational educational institutions. A particularly sore point among the more militant women is that when recently the presidencies of two great woman's colleges were vacant both were filled by men.

Dean Gildersleeve of Barnard College herself a brilliant example of scholarly culture, of first class executive ability and of tempered judgment and expression, gives as her opinion there are few more women professors in co-education institutions then there were twenty five years ago, and there are actually fewer proportionally in women's colleges. While increasing numbers of women are achieving sound intellectual culture expecting to be able to use it within college walls, the college walls are closing.
The same situation exists in other professions. Everywhere it is common talk among women in trades and professions that the reason they are not getting to the top in larger numbers is man's lack of sympathy, as well as his frequent open opposition to their program.

But is it fair to insist that man is the only or chief at the top cause of the lag of the woman's program? It must not be forgotten how many more persons, men as well as women, are applying. Women are offering themselves in overfilled markets where the competition between men, as well as between men and women, is bitter. One has only to read contemporary literature, so largely now concerned with the material difficulties in which men and women find themselves, to realize what a part competition plays between men and how criminally unfair are many of its practices.

When I hear women artists complaining that men are willfully pushing them out of the art world I recall the men I have heard declaring that it was the jealousy or selfishness of their fellows that had kept them from exhibiting, had hung their pictures badly, had been back of the bad criticisms they had received. That is, there is as much of human nature's established ways of wickedness in the discrimination of which women complain as there is of man's prejudice against women.
And there are other reasons of importance in any serious consideration of the progress of a movement. Not a little of the difficulty in the woman's progress comes from the breaking down of the old divisions of labor. You cannot tear up the way things have been done through many, many generations without unhappy dislocations, long periods of re-adjustment. Woman had a well defined and an important position in the old social and economic world. She had essential duties recognized and respected. She certainly paid her way. But the old ways and creeds and ideals began to give place to new ways, creeds, ideals. She belonged to a world which slowly but surely was taking itself apart. Men were dreaming a world with the equalities and liberties and enlightments, so far enjoyed only by the few, open to everybody. They sought to rid her as well as themselves of heavy labor, turn it over to machines. Women saw herself losing her old position and she laid down her demands/gradually they were agreed to - all of them. But the program has not quickly given her what she dreamed it would anymore than man's program of a world serviced by machines and devoted to life, liberty and happiness/satisfied him. The machines demanded a service as great as they give and the decrees, fine as they sounded, left men where they were, still forced to sweat and die for life, liberty and happiness.
There are other reasons. One is that of the lady who could place an order in six figures but declared that as soon as she was able to get her house in the country she was done with business. Women as a class are not adventurers, do not want change. By necessity they must conserve the essential social unit, the family, and to do that they cannot be running around the globe exploring; they cannot be trying out machines which upset things. They must hold steady the great conservative forces of the world. They do not get to the top faster because the lower positions give them the economic assistance they want in holding together what they regard as more important and desirable things in their lives. Feeling this way they only occasionally give that creative force which is necessary if they are to get to the top. They give that force to continuing life on the earth, shaping it in its established and most plastic stages.

It is this instinctive sense of the field of life most important for a woman that has the strongest hope that women may contribute something fundamental and of her own to the complex question of building peace as a permanent way of life. So far she has done little save to adopt man's peace implements; propaganda, organization, petitioning, talk. She has walked by his side in parades and sat in conventions made after his pattern, and doing what he has always done come out where he has always come - another war.
I do not mean to intimate that all this petitioning and organizing and agitation has meant nothing. As a matter of fact I believe that it is largely responsible for the present insistent and widespread demand for peaceful settlement of international problems. But the demand is hazy, trusts too much to words. It has little of the scientific persistent effort that men give to preparing for war. We must have training for peace as for war.

Has woman nothing of her own to offer? One woman at least has recently offered something worth the gravest consideration, something which brushing aside all the political and mechanistic contrivances for ending war lays bare its roots. This is Virginia Woolf in her essay, "Three Guineas."

Miss Woolf is answering the man's demand that women help him put an end to war. Putting an end to war, she agrees, is one of the three great aims of the educated woman. It is essential to achieving her first and second aims: 1) Freedom of movement in the world. 2) The right and power to earn her living. You must have a peaceful world to do this properly.

But what does the educated woman find when she goes into professions to earn her living? She finds men in the professions greedy, jealous, pugnacious, positive as to the verdicts of law, God, nature, property. But these are the
fundamental causes of war. How can you expect to eradicate them from national life, asks Miss Woolf, if you cultivate them in daily professional life? How can women enter the professions and yet remain a civilized human being, that is a human being who would outlaw war?

Her answer to man is, "We can best help you to prevent war, not by repeating your words and following your methods, but by finding new words and creating new methods." Here are the methods she proposes for the educated self-supporting woman to whom she speaks:

1) Cut out that greed which underlies strife by earning no more than she needs!

2) Practicing her profession for the sake of research, experiment, art, teaching, refusing to sell her brains for money.

3) Eschew root and branch all publicity, badges, honors, degrees. They are signs of the rivalry which feeds the militant spirit.

4) Cut herself off from "unreal loyalties" — national pride — religious pride — college pride — school pride — family pride — sex pride — all prides.

What it amounts to is turning your back on all those practices which build up ill-will among men so to regulate your life that it will make only for good will.
But it is not a way that the women who struggle for the top in the man's world are likely to adopt. It is in the rank and file of women whether they are counted among those in gainful occupations or not, that there is the most hope of any such radical character-building program as is insisted upon by Virginia Woolf. In this rank and file women are, generally speaking, accepting and preferring the obligation that nature and society have put upon them, the obligation of creating and holding together that foundation of civilization - the family. There the woman holds a strategic position in the task of creating human beings who are self-respecting, disciplined, reasonable, considerate of others. The woman who heads a family knows that the happiness and serenity of her little world depends upon these things, and that her great task as a creative leader there is to do her utmost to develop them. She understands as man rarely does the supreme importance of the daily relations of life.

Woman's best chance of contributing to the permanent peace of the world lies in family leadership. Her preference for that life keeps her in the rank and file of business, of commerce, arts, professional life, politics. It is not an inability to reach the top. The few who do it
have demonstrated in the last hundred years fully enough that woman has the capacity to lead in all these fields when that is what she wants to do. But it is not what the majority want to do. They instinctively see a greater field, that of creating and upbuilding the type of human being which alone will make a civilization peaceful and happy; essential to making a peaceful and happy civilization.