

"ON BEING A WOMAN"

Remarks of the  
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Being an American woman in the world today is the most exciting, most challenging and most rewarding role that anyone could possibly have.

It often seems to me that in this particular day and age we women "have our cake and eat it too."

In spite of all that has been said and written pro and con, the emergence of women into full participation in all phases of American life, women continue to be women first of all, and add unto this primary necessity, successful activities in business, in the professions, in politics and government and diplomacy.

What is a woman?

Is she "sugar and spice and everything nice", as we were told when we are little girls? I hope so. Perhaps those who tell us these pleasant things are proceeding on the theory "Give a dog a name and he will live up to it." Certainly I think that is the way the men in our lives want us to be, whether it be our fathers, brothers, sweethearts or employers.

Perhaps each age and generation has had its own ideal of what a woman is. One I like particularly well is given by Stephen Vincent Benet in his epic American poem, "John Brown's Body." Do you remember his description of a Southern woman of the Civil War Period?

'Mary Lou Wingate, as slightly made  
and as hard to break as a rapier blade,  
"She loved her hands and they made her vain  
the tiny hands of her generation  
that gathered the reins of the whole plantation -  
"The velvet sheathing the steel demurely  
In the trained light grip that holds securely  
She was at work by candlelight  
She was at work in the death of night  
Sweating out troubles and healing schisms  
And doctoring phtisics and rheumatism -  
"She knew the whole duty of a woman-kind  
To take the burden and have the power  
And seem the well-protected flower."



Perhaps to some of you that speaks of a Southern world now  
dead and gone - but to me there is much wisdom in it. Even today it  
is not out of place to take the burden and have the power and seem the  
well-protected flower.

What Mary Lou Wingate did in the South was no more than the  
accomplishments of one pioneer woman who helped to settle the West,  
or of our own valiant Pilgrim forbears. Since I have many New England  
ancestors I may quote the wit who once said - "We hear so much of the  
hardships of the Pilgrim Fathers - but think of the Pilgrim Mothers -  
they not only had to endure the same hardships, but they had to live  
with the Pilgrim Fathers!"

Whatever our forbears may have been - Pilgrim or Cavalier - early or late settlers in this land - women have for the most part been a privileged lot and their men have done well by them.

Being in this part of Massachusetts, I am reminded of the Baccalaureate sermon at my graduation at Smith College. It was given by President Neilson - he must have said many wise and learned things but I remember only two very simple statements of his, the first was this: "Whoever has planted a flower where none grew before has made the world a better place to live in." The second was: "It is your duty at all times to look as well as you can because of the effect it has on those who must look at you."



I think every school teacher has been wise enough to learn this. The rest of us should remember it - especially at the breakfast table. We can't all be beauties, but we should seek to "walk in beauty all our days." I refer to the inner beauty of love and understanding. That is the true beauty that husbands look for at the breakfast table, the beauty that children find in their mother's smile. It is a beauty that has humor in it, and sympathy and comprehension. It is the only beauty that really counts and it is to be had for the seeking by all.

Lest it seem that too much emphasis is being put upon appearance, let me share with you one more piece of advice which was given to Edith Wharton, the novelist, by her mother when she was a little girl worrying for fear she would never be pretty. The mother said: "Be pretty if you can, be clever if you must, but be agreeable if it kills you.!"



When we speak of plantation days, or western pioneer days, or pilgrim days, we realize what a relatively easy time we women have now.- except those early years of young married life when a young mother has her hands more than full.

No more could the story be told of the seven strapping sons who began to worry over their mother's failing strength. She didn't seem to have as much energy as she used to when she chopped the kindling for the wood stove. So the boys held a council to see what they could do to help mother. Finally they came up with a perfect solution - they decided to buy her a new axe!

Today we don't have to split the wood or make the fire - we turn a switch and in a short time the frozen foods are cooked and on the table - and mighty good too!

There is no doubt that we have more free time - time to flitter away, or time to stand at slot machines as they do in Las Vegas - or time for church work, hospital work, Community Fund, Red Cross, Salvation Army - and innumerable other worthy causes.

We are told by women of other countries that we have intelligent husbands - and I think we do - maybe I'd prefer to say - understanding husbands - they are, by and large, proud of the accomplishments of their women in church and community service. I always feel too, that family conversation is enriched by the mothers who are engaged in worthwhile projects and bring discussion of these things to the family dinner table.

Certainly women today must agree with this thesis, for 65% of them belong to at least one of the organizations devoted to community service.



And what of women in business?

They are successful as wage earners in their own right. It comes as something of a surprise that today there are 22 million women at work - almost one-third of our total working force - and one half of them are married too. They work in every category listed in the 1950 census.

I'd like to share with you a secret I learned as a full time worker in Washington. It's lots easier to go to your office, carry through the duties of the day, hard and demanding though they be, than it is to run a home, perhaps care for a sick child, entertain a visiting client of your husbands, cope with a leak in the roof - and still deliver that speech you promised to make weeks ago when it looked like clear sailing ahead!

From time immemorial women have been expected to be home makers, mothers, administrators and diplomats, and today they are wage earners as well. - What is a woman? She is the mother who comforts and cherishes us when we are little - She is the sweetheart who embodies all the graces, - She is the wife and helpmeet who shares all the joys and sorrows, failures or success of her husband - "in sickness and in health 'till death do us part." She is the secretary on whom her boss depends to order his business day - She is the teacher, the doctor, the nurse, the lawyer - or most frequently these days - career woman and wife and neither all at once. She is that most important influence in American life. The American club woman and volunteer worker. She is the most gifted, the most



versatile, sometimes the most harried and confused; but at best she is, in the words of Wadsworth - "Nobly planned - to warm - to comfort - and command."

Much has been written and said about women, but I am speaking to you today in a very personal way.

My graduation from college came in the same year that Suffrage was granted. So the whole fight for women's right to vote and hold office were part of my youthful years. My father was in favor of women's suffrage. He had grown up in the South where unmarried women could only teach music or school, and had almost no financial independence and were hemmed about by all sorts of restrictions - both social and political. A woman was supposed to get married, her husband was supposed to support her in the style to which she was accustomed, and her place was in the home. Period.

My father thought that women should have more freedom under both political and social laws.

Those of us who as women, take our voting privilege so lightly should remember the fight made by the valiant women who made it possible for us today to vote, to help form party policy, to hold the highest administrative positions in our government. Often they were sustained by their husbands in their fights. Mrs. Harvey Wiley, still living in Washington, told me that she was among the early suffrage leaders who picketed the White House in favor of votes for women. She was arrested and sent to jail. Her husband was then the U. S. Food and Drug Administrator, a well-known and distinguished member of official Washington. When she told him she was about to go to jail, and

asked him if he would be ashamed of her, or humiliated, he said:

"I always admire those who stand up for principle, and I admire you for this too."

My mother was not so interested in suffrage, but she was not an anti-suffragette. She was a wonderful person - gay - rising above difficulties, spiritual, friendly, always a great woman and a great lady.



A few days ago some of my friends and I were discussing what older women in Boston we would most like to resemble. Several distinguished ladies were mentioned - but when it was my turn I said - "I'd like to be like my mother."

I want to talk a bit about the mother-daughter relationship. It is sometimes complicated by friction, jealousy, lack of understanding. I've known so many daughters who rebelled against all their families stood for, but who in time became close to their families again. This usually happened when they found love and happiness in their own marriages, or success in their jobs.

The mixed feelings of some mothers of the present day are shown in the letter received by Dorothy Dix. It said: "I am broken-hearted because my daughter wants to marry a man who is not of our religion and who hasn't got a penny to his name. How can I stop her from marrying him - and on which side does the bride's mother sit?"

Maybe some mothers are too busily engaged in outside activities to have time for serenity and understanding and just plain fun with the family. With the constantly mounting pressure upon women to run the world as well as their own family it is something to guard against.

I think I probably agree with Alice in Wonderland that it is love which makes the world go round. We need alot of it in our families. There was a mother who was most upset because her daughter was getting a divorce. How should she meet this crisis? She did not at all approve of divorce. A very wise counsellor told her: "You have just one role in life now - that is to love your daughter and let her know it."

The mothers of America must be doing a pretty good job for a nation-wide survey made by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center showed that eight out of ten girls felt as I did - they wanted to be like their mother.

To those who worry about the future of America, and in particular its young people, it is interesting to note that 94% expected to get married some day. We all know that in addition to there being more marriages than ever, the birth rate is the highest in our recent history.

Which reminds me of an anecdote told me by one of the early leaders of the suffrage movement in Massachusetts. Mrs. Anna M. Tillinghast. She related that when she went to the Massachusetts legislature to secure votes for the ratification of the Suffrage Amendment, one of the Senators said to her: "Mrs. Tillinghast, if we give women the vote they won't stay at home and have babies anymore!"

How wrong he was. There's something about us - maybe it's part of being a woman - we like to be mothers and grandmothers!

Now what about women in politics?







Today in 1957 there is an all time high of women in State legislature - 314 - as compared to 29 in 1920. As you see there has been a slow but steady and encouraging growth in this field. Today there are 28 women serving as State Senators - 286 women in State legislatures. This reflects the increasing interest of women in government, and also their special concern for problems which call for legislative planning and action.

For each of these women serving in this way, think of the thousands and thousands of women who work in Republican or Democratic women's organizations, in the League of Women Voters, in other civic organizations devoted to bettering our neighborhoods or communities, our States and our Nation. And to most of the women the guiding motive is to give and not to get.

What of women in Government?

It is most interesting that most of the women appointed to high positions in the Eisenhower Administration are women who have been married, had children, worked in community service or gratified themselves in the same sort of work in which many of you are engaged, before rising to high positions in Government.

To cite a few -

The top women in the first term of the Eisenhower Administration were Mrs. Clare Booth Luce - wife, mother, author, Congresswoman, Ambassador. Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby - wife, mother, parliamentarian of the Texas Legislature, newspaper woman, Director of the WACS, member of the Cabinet.

My former position as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Civil Defense Administration was the third ranking position given to a woman - and one of the highest positions ever occupied by a woman. After a year and a half I resigned it, because it worked a hardship on my family. They missed me and needed me, and I missed them and needed them. When I went to see President Eisenhower to tell him of my resignation because my husband wanted me to come home, he said, "Well, if you'd been my wife I wouldn't have let you stay as long as this."



But then he went on to say - "But we don't want to lose you, why don't you stay on as a Consultant" - which I did - with interesting and important duties.

Mrs. Hiram Houghton, Assistant Director of F. O. A., felt the same way after two years - and resigned to return to her home duties. Mrs. Hobby, Mrs. Houghton, and I have felt the call of family ties, over the challenge of public service. To be sure, in resigning as Deputy Administrator, I have been given the high honor of serving as one of the two U. S. Delegates to the NATO Civil Defense Committee - the only woman delegate from any NATO country on any NATO committees. It is a privilege to form policy on a national and international level in an area so important to the peace of the world.

I would like to enter a plea for more participation by more women in politics and government. We all know in our hearts that sound laws, wisely administered, are the very tap roots of good government. Too many of us are unwilling to do our part.

We are governed in a hundred ways at every level - Federal, State and local - throughout our lives. The quality of that government

determines the kind of education our children get, the advantages we can give them, and in a sense, the sort of men and women they will eventually be.

What better career could a woman have than the very government which so intimately affects her children's lives, and the lives of their children in turn. Lady Reading, the head of the Women's Voluntary Services in England, has said, "Service to others is the rent we pay for our living space on earth."



The tensions of modern life can best be met by service. They can be met by doing not worrying - by acting, not drifting. There is no doubt that we are plagued by tensions and anxieties.

I'd like to share with you a prayer which I find comforting and helpful.

"Cheered by the presence of God, I will do each day, without anxiety, according to my strength, those tasks to which His providence has assigned me."

And so we come to the final point I want to make "On Being A Woman." It is one that you who are here today knew full well. It is that we need as women the spiritual strength which comes from giving ourselves to God, and serving him always. We need the spiritual refreshment of the communion service. We need to always feel God's presence within us.

We need always to observe the Commandment -

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart -

and with all thy mind -

and thy neighbor as thyself."

We need to "take time to be holy" - and to bring religion, as a reality into our homes.

May I share with you another prayer which has helped me through many difficult moments in home, community, as a government officer.

"O God, give me strength to live another day

Let me not turn coward before its difficulties

Let me not lose faith in my fellowmen

Keep me sweet and sound of heart

in spite of ingratitude, treachery or meanness

Preserve me from minding little stings or giving them

Help me to keep my heart clean,

and to live so honestly and fearlessly that no

outward failure can dishearten me or take away the

joy of conscious integrity

Open wide the eyes of my soul that I may see good

in all things

Grant me this day, some new vision of thy truth

Inspire me with the spirit of gladness, and make

me the cup of strength to suffering souls

In the name of the strong Deliver

Our only Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ. Amen.



What sort of women will we be - what sort of mothers -  
sweethearts - wives - career women - nurses - doctors - secretaries -  
business women. Will we be real women - possessed of loving hearts  
and willing hands - the kind of woman described in Proverbs XXX:

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue  
is the law of kindness.

"Her children rise up and call her blessed,  
her husband also, and he praiseth her."

Because of the influence and example of those of you who  
are here today, I am sure many more will decide to be the kind of  
woman you are - women endowed with the knowledge of spiritual values,  
who have dedicated your lives to the service of all that is best in  
your homes, in your church, in your community.

Thank you.

