

Two Talks before the Women Students' Organization

(dates uncertain)

From the very beginning women have always been a problem for men, and they have suffered special problems just because they were women. The fact that they have to be reckoned with has never been questioned. In fact, in primitive mythologies, the supreme deity was not a male god but a female god -- a kind of personification of Mother Nature, looked upon as supreme because only the female can give birth to new life and keep the world going.

The fact that woman has traditionally been considered as a problem by the male of the species is made clear by the stories of her origin. Pandora was created for only one purpose -- as a punishment for man; and when she opened her box, she released all the evils of the world. Eve, in the Bible, was not created specifically to cause man trouble, but she very effectively managed to do so.

A woman in ancient Greece was looked upon by men more as a possession than as a person; but she was a very desirable possession, both for physical pleasure and for bearing children. In their literature, a long war was fought over Helen of Troy, the epitome of a beautiful woman. And in the Greek play *Lysistrata* the women stop a war simply by refusing en masse to permit any sexual relationship until the men quit fighting. And I understand that earlier this month many senators voted for the ERA deadline extension because they were afraid to go home and face their wives if they didn't.

Women also had a great deal to do with the shaping of Rome. It was the ambitious Tanaquil who nagged her husband into coming to Rome, and who did not let up on him until he got himself made the fifth king of Rome. And it was the rape of the lady Lucretia by a Roman prince that sparked the rebellion of the Roman people and caused them to throw out the kings and establish the republic.

Later, during the rule of the emperors, there were some very powerful women. Augustus' wife Livia was referred to as a "Ulysses in petticoats." It was said that Augustus ruled Rome, but Livia ruled Augustus. And she finagled to get Tiberius, her son by a previous marriage, chosen to succeed Augustus rather than one of his direct descendants. Then there was Claudius' wife Messalina who, although less than twenty years old, managed to have life and death power over the citizens of Rome. Obviously, it is not just a modern warning that one should never underestimate the power of a woman.

But all of these powers were effective only in the influence women were able to exert on men. They did not present woman as an independent entity, capable of functioning totally on her own. In fact, that time still has not come, really. We still have a lot of work to do to get ourselves accepted as the equals of men. We have not reached the point where we can compete with men for jobs on a fair basis. If a man and a woman with the same qualifications apply for a job, the man will be given preference. A woman has to be better than a man to get and to hold the same job. And even then she will not be paid on the same basis as a man. A professional woman once said: "to work with men, a woman needs to do only three things: look like a girl, act like a lady, and work like a dog."

And discrimination goes even further than hiring and salary. Unless the law has been changed (and I don't think it has), a woman surgeon cannot perform an operation in Illinois. She can only "assist." Maybe we have come a long way, Baby, but we still have a long way to go.

Sometimes it seems that when we want something very badly, we try too hard and destroy our chances. And in our struggle for equality, many mistakes have been made which work against our purposes.

Sometimes insignificant things have been blown out of all proportion to such an extent that they have turned off men who would be willing to accept us as equal partners instead of just "helpers." But if the whole thing is going to develop into a pitched battle over whether I am the chairman or the chairperson of a department, what we really want gets fogged over with silliness, and our cause looks petty and laughable. And laughter is one of the most destructive weapons in the world. The whole problem becomes distorted because people have a tendency to generalize from a single instance. I remember something I once read in the *Reader's Digest*: If a man makes a mistake, other men say, "What a fool that man is"; but if a woman makes a mistake, men say, "What fools women are."

Another danger is the idea that some women have that equality with men means being identical. Well, a woman is not a man; and when she tries to act and talk like one, she is as ridiculous as a man in drag. We are not the same, thank goodness; and I don't think that a woman has to give up her femininity at all to be treated as an "equal."

All right, what have I been trying to say?

First, a female dominated world was not good; but neither is a male dominated society. It seems to me that it is about time for us to try being partners, to see how that works. Let sex take its rightful place in our lives -- as pleasure and a means of having a family. But in all other areas of life, it should not be taken into consideration any more than the color of the eyes. Our aim is to "share" both the privileges and responsibilities of living, and to have both men and women judged only on their qualifications, and compensated on how effectively they can handle a job.

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The Educated Woman

My talk may not be what you expect from me. Usually I talk about my subjects -- Latin or mythology. And off campus (not on campus, since the people there know me better) I have acquired a reputation for presenting amusing speeches. But what I have to say to you tonight has no direct connection with the classics, and it is not the least bit amusing. I want to talk with you for a few minutes on what I think makes a truly educated woman.

There is some difference between the essentials for a truly educated woman and those for a truly educated man, for although we want equal rights in the world, we do not mean that we simply want to be indistinguishable from the male of the species. A woman does not have to give up her femininity in order to stand beside a man on equal terms. I feel that a liberal education is even more important for a woman than it is for a man because she is the one who at more points adds charm, and grace, and beauty, and delicacy to the world around her. The subject, then, that I would like to talk to you about is what a woman should know by the time she walks across that platform and changes from a college student to a college graduate.

The things I shall mention have little to do with specific subjects, because you will rarely be called upon to prove to anyone that you know the date of the eruption of Vesuvius or the exact formula of a chemical compound. What really happens to you when you become educated is that your personality and your philosophy of life change and develop. The most

valuable parts of your education will come from intellectual and emotional experiences whose contribution to your total growth you cannot put down into any neatly computerized list. I remember an English author who was terribly disillusioned by his university education because he said that it had failed completely to teach the most important subject of all -- how to be happy.

Well, what are the basic things for you to learn? One thing you want to pick up is culture, that vague but easily recognizable quality which marks the difference between a lady and a savage. Culture implies a sensitivity to the subtler, finer things in the world, and the appreciation of these things makes a person's life more pleasurable for herself and more agreeable for those around her. The cultured woman knows not only where to find but also how to add touches of beauty to living. This includes being a gracious person socially, being able to talk with other people interestingly -- and this involves being genuinely interested in other people, for no one is very appealing who can talk about only one person -- herself.

And being interested in the other person includes courtesy. Nothing makes a person more agreeable than her consideration for those around her. At one time the Monmouth College campus was widely known for the courtesy of its student body. Gradually that reputation seemed to fade, but within the last year or two I have seen evidence of its possible return, and I am delighted. The door of Wallace Hall has not been slammed in my face quite so often as I tried to get out with a load of books in my arms. And I have heard the words "please" and "thank you" more often.

We often think that courtesy and chivalry are synonyms, and that courtesy means for a man to remove his hat indoors and to open a door for a woman. It does. But, since we are talking girl talk now, let me make a special point about feminine courtesy. Nothing infuriates me more than to see a boy hold a door open for a girl, and then she barges through without even a smile or a "thank you," as if the boy were a gargoye built into the wall.

And there are other points in this consideration for other people -- such things as not being repulsive in appearance. Cleanliness, neatness, good taste, the things that make a person attractive, are all a part of culture. A cultured person will not go downtown with curlers in her hair. Last year I actually saw a woman board a plane to fly to Europe that way! And a cultured woman will not sit in a classroom with her shoes kicked off while she wiggles her bare toes for entertainment. Bare feet feel good, but they do not look good. There are places for them, but the classroom is not one of them. The cultured woman will attract attention not by being uglier than her surroundings but by adding a touch of charm and beauty to the world around her.

Very closely allied with courtesy is tolerance. For, if we are genuinely interested in the other person's well-being, we are also tolerant of his deficiencies. However, let me make one point very clear. Tolerance does not mean that you accept the idea that "everything goes." An educated woman will have standards -- high standards -- for herself even more than for other people. One very important thing for your pleasure in life is self-respect. You don't need to worry about what other people think of you as long as you sincerely respect yourself. For, not too strangely, if you respect yourself, almost invariably other people will respect you.

And there are other things besides social charm that an educated woman will have, since her first duty is to herself.

The educated woman will know herself. She must know her strengths and weaknesses, find ways to develop her best points and to compensate for her weaknesses. And she must be completely honest with herself. Excessive modesty is as disgusting as excessive boldness -- or

almost so. Every person is potentially an interesting person. With the self-confidence that comes from this conviction, the educated woman develops her finer qualities and becomes the woman that she is capable of becoming. This doesn't just happen; she has to work at it. She will not eat her heart out because some other girl has qualities and talents which she lacks. She will accept herself as she is -- with all her flaws -- and make her life something wonderful from the materials at hand. Sometimes some of the loveliest creations are made from materials that do not seem very promising at first glance.

Another thing that I consider essential to a happy life is a sense of humor. A person who takes everything too seriously (including herself) is bound to spend much of her life nursing emotional wounds. One must learn to laugh at the things that are not quite the way she would have them. Nothing is going to be without some flaw.

I remember vividly the first time I ever faced a class as a full-fledged college instructor. I was teaching a course in freshman English at the University of Kentucky. No actor in his first performance was ever more terrified than I was. I could hardly speak, and my knees were literally shaking. Then I looked at the class and realized that they were equally worried about this new instructor. A frightened class and a frightened instructor facing each other struck me as funny -- and from that point on, everything was all right. A thing cannot be amusing and terrifying at the same time.

So I would say that a very helpful piece of your learning is acquiring the ability to laugh at yourself a little bit. It makes the whole business of living so much less painful.

And now I want to talk to you about what I consider possibly the most important single thing that a young person of your generation must learn, and that is self-discipline. You are the generation that has almost completely discarded the discipline imposed on the young by others. All of us at your age chafed under the restrictions put upon us and resented the do's and don't's from our elders; but you happen to live in the generation that has en masse kicked your elders in the teeth and said that you will live by your own rules. You will make the rules; and if they don't like it that's just too bad. You will not accept standards imposed on you by another generation which has not succeeded in producing a very good world. That is all right, if you have other standards to replace the old ones, which will be as good or better. You may refuse to eat the food at the college food service (I wouldn't blame you much) but you had better have some other food to take its place, or you will eventually die. This is true in other realms of even more consequence. As a whole generation you must learn how to discipline yourselves or you will die. This world is in greater danger from your lack of self-control than it is from nuclear explosions. You can't build your life around doing only what you want to do. It just won't work. When you have a baby, you may not be exactly eager to change its diaper, but I would recommend that you do it anyhow. I hate to tell you this, but you will spend at least 75% of the rest of your life doing what you are not keenly interested in doing. But then there will be that other 25% which will make the whole thing worthwhile.

There are many other qualities you can acquire that will help you to live a rich, full life, which is, after all, the chief purpose of a liberal education. But I have mentioned a few that you can pick up on your way to your degree, all of which, I think, are absolutely essential. These can more or less be summarized under four heading: culture, self-respect, self-knowledge, and self-discipline.

As I watch you walk across that platform to shake hands with the president and receive that all-important piece of paper, if I feel that you have developed the characteristics that I have

been talking about, I shall say to myself, "Now, there goes an educated woman." You will be what an English poet so well described as a woman "made of flint and roses."