

Louise McKinney Readings

Where are Canadian Women Going, Back to Their Homes or Continue in Business Life?

Woman's work and woman's sphere have always furnished a favorite topic of conversation. Her activities and resourcefulness during the war exploded many of the old theories and gained for her many of the privileges which for years she had claimed to be her right. Now that the war is over the public mind is seized with a new dread, and the subject for popular comment is whether women will be willing to relinquish her newfound liberty and wider sphere of activity and resume her place as home-maker in the same old way or will she continue to claim her present place in the industrial world and thus constitute one more of the already numerous after-the-war problems.

This, it is argued, would be a double tragedy, because she would turn her back upon home life and would at the same time keep out of employment vast numbers of men who would otherwise be needed in the various positions now occupied by women.

I have unbounded confidence in the women of Canada and in the future of Canada and also in the modern woman movement, and therefore have not the slightest doubt that present conditions are merely a phase of the question that will eventually work out for good and not for evil.

Speaking of lessons learned from the war, there is one lesson that has become quite

commonplace-it has been stated so frequently and accepted so unquestioningly. It is this-that the real strength of our men in Europe was their wonderful "morale," which was due not only to the high moral purpose for which they were fighting, but also to the morale of the people at home. Indeed, it was this spirit at home that made possible the spirit of our men in France.

Another lesson that has not been given quite so much prominence, but is nevertheless quite as true, is this: The signing of peace terms and the forming of a League of Nations will be effective in maintaining peace only in so far as there is developed within the various nations involved those ideals that make for peace. Following this thought a little further, we are ready to admit that such a task can be undertaken by no machinery of government unless that government has back of it a people of strong moral purpose, and such a people can be produced by no other means than through the homes of the nation.

Then, what is the message that comes clear and strong to the women of Canada to-day-a message that transcends in importance any other that may press its claims upon us. It is simply this-if Canada is to maintain her place among the nations of the world-a place purchased by the splendid sacrifice of her noble sons and the equally splendid courage of their heroic mothers-she must continue to foster the institution that gave birth to her greatness-the Christian home and her women can perform no higher form of national service than this.

But how are we going to reconcile this with woman's present ideas regarding her work? For answer, let us pause and ask another question. What, after all, is the purpose of woman's life? The purpose of woman's life is just the same as the purpose of man's life-that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living. Then, why all the striving and unrest? The answer to this is two-fold. First, we have failed too often to recognize this purpose and have felt we were here to seek our own pleasure-in other words, that it was ours to be ministered unto and not to minister, or to get out of the world as much as possible in the line of comfort and give in return as little as possible in the line of service.

The second cause of unrest is one that probably accounts in great measure for the first, and,

whether the individual woman was conscious of it or not, was and is at the bottom of all her struggles for wider liberty. This is the desire for recognition as an individual: and no person can possibly develop his best or contribute his best unless such recognition is given. Now that such recognition is given, we must admit that every society, not so that we believe that we are running any risk by so doing, for the average woman will continue to feel that her contribution can best be made through the medium of the home, not because woman is so intensely patriotic that she deliberately makes this choice, but because in the very nature of things it is so, and the average woman instinctively loves home life. So my message is intended not so much to persuade women to enter homes as, having done so, to recognize the dignity and importance of that which they have undertaken, and to remember that any task is noble which in any way tends to improve home conditions or minister to the comfort of those included in the home circle.

... There is no question to-day, social, financial or religious, that does not touch your home or the homes of the nation. What about the young men and women about us, as well as the young mothers in our midst, who need to come in friendly sympathetic touch with people of your ideals? Is our educational system just what will best fit our children for citizenship? If the girls of to-day are to be efficient mothers, are their working hours, the conditions under which they work and the remuneration they receive such as to make this possible, or are we permitting the greed or shortsightedness of employers to mortgage the future of our homes?

If it is true that many men cannot marry because their income will not permit it, should we not interest ourselves in helping to make it possible for every young man to receive sufficient education-academic or technical-to fit him for earning an honorable living and then demand that the living wage will be sufficient to support wife and family? Since many women will either from choice or from force of circumstances, continue to earn a living outside the home, are we not in duty bound to stand for the principle of equal pay for equal work? And would not more women be willing to give up their business careers and enter homes of their own if the principle of economic independence for women were established by law? The housing problem,

the question of public health, the fight against venereal disease, the over throw of the liquor traffic are all matters of vital interest to women, because of their direct bearing on the home. All of these, and numerous other questions that suggest themselves to you, will lead us far afield and deep into social and political problems, both national and international, but why should we not be interested in all of these?

If woman is to succeed in developing strong moral principles in her family she will keep a close touch with God and the church. I have never been willing to admit that women were essentially more religious than men, and yet I hold that the woman who fosters a religious atmosphere in the home has done much to anchor and strengthen the life of the husband, and to make it possible for him to be strong and true in the strain and worry of business life; and father, mother and children all need to cultivate the spiritual and to identify themselves with the church of God, as the recognized agency for developing high ideals and fostering a love for and a vital interest in our fellow men, both of which find their highest expression in service.

Nor would I be understood as dwelling too much on the thoughtful and serious, and neglecting the play life, for physical and mental fitness presupposes a balanced life with a reasonable amount of recreation, and the wise woman will not overlook this fact. Just let us remember that our task is a noble one, and that in its accomplishment we have the assurance that all the powers of the universe are at our command, if we but link ourselves with the Divine, and that for a reward we have the joy of accomplishment as well as the pleasure of association with our dear ones from day to day. Could any life be narrow or colorless with such a prospect ahead?

Canadian Home Journal Aug. 1919.

Alberta Women and Alberta Laws

"I wish to suggest to the speaker," said the positive man, "that her whole talk to us tonight is built upon a premise that some of us at least will not accept, as this foundation is not correct, and misleading. The speaker takes it for granted that the wife earns half of the entire estate, a situation which I would be far from admitting. The husband is the earner, the wife earns nothing, is not a producer at all, but is supported by the earnings of the husband."

"May I ask the gentleman," the speaker questioned, "if he thinks that the wife in addition to laboring more hours a day than the husband, in addition to bearing and rearing his children, should pay board; or does the gentle think that she earns her board and keep? Would he go as far as that?"

"Certainly," the man replied rather tartly, "she earns much more than that. I never made any such insinuation. Why every husband gives his wife much more than that. I insist that most men are generous with their wives."

"You are begging the question," the speaker persisted. "As I understand it we have not tonight been discussing the amount the husbands 'give' their wives, their generosity or their selfishness is not the question. The point upon which my friend took issue was the amount 'the wife earns'. Will you please stick to the question at hand? Will you please state how much more than her board and keep you consider would be just for the services of a wife? It is difficult to believe that you were really sincere in your objection if you are unwilling to follow your own argument to its logical conclusion. You object to the amount that I think she earns. You admit that she earns more than her board and keep. With those two points determined, the amount she really does earn should be easy to decide. Please be explicit."

Excerpt from "Alberta Women and Alberta Laws." Lethbridge Herald. October 8, 1920. p.10.

"I have never figured it out. That is a point for every man to decide for himself. I do not believe we should bring the law into family relationships."

HUSBAND'S WHIM, WIFE'S LAW

"I asked you not to beg the question," the speaker insisted, "and you have done so to assure me that the wife is, or should be, without the protection of the law. In other words, the protection of the law is for every emigrant who seeks our shores, for every flotsam and jetsam of civilization or barbarism, except for the wife and mother. Her only law is her husband's whim; you say the law should not be brought into the family relationships. I am seeking to take away some of the iniquitous laws which are already dividing the home. Now I am proposing to keep right on this track: until I get an idea from this gentleman as to how much he thinks a wife earns, and every time he dodges the issue I shall wait until he returns and renew the attack. Do you think the wife earns as much as she would doing exactly the same work for some one other than her husband?"

"That is self evident," the questioner replied, not very graciously.

"Good, now we have some point from which to proceed. How much do you think a woman laboring say 14 or 18 hours a day could command in the open market, when the 8 hour day is customary? That would be just about two days work every day. Would \$50.00 per month be too much?"

"I suppose not, but she would have no home, and no one to take care for her as her husband did," said the questioner uncertainly.

"Again you are evading the issue. I know of no reason why her husband should not take care of her even if he is just to her; in fact I have observed that those who are just, usually care more for their wives than those who are not. If you are suggesting that the wife should labor all those years for the affection she receives at the hands of her husband, I think many women would prefer being paid in a different kind of coin than that which she received. You can hardly tell me either that a woman who earns \$600 a year over and above her board can not have a home of her own. She has earned her husband's home over and over again.

“But this is the point upon which I do insist, if the wife does not earn half, then decide what she does earn. If she is not a partner, then she is a servant. If a partner, she should have her part. If a servant, she should have wages. I presume that most men if they had to give their wives the wages they would receive for the same service elsewhere, should welcome a partnership instead, \$600 per year, or a much smaller sum, laid by every year during marriage would be a much larger sum than that represented by the husband’s estate.

THAT FALLACY OF SUPPORT AGAIN

“But you forget that the husband is responsible for the support of the wife, and that he also and he alone is responsible for the support of the children. That is the reason that it is but justice that he be given the property,” another individual offered.

“You are mistaken,” the speaker informed him. “At our last session of the legislature an Act was passed making the property of the mother equally liable for the support of the children with that of the father. Besides, according to the criminal code, the mother had always been equally liable if by neglect the children suffer. You cannot spring that reason for the father having all the property.

“As to the husband’s liability, for the support of the wife, that fallacy is a hardly perennial. If you will use the term: “must give a pittance toward her support,” the term would be more nearly correct, but even that is too much to use as a real statement of actual facts. A case was lately tried in Saskatoon where a man found a place for his wife in the home of his son. Although the wife said that she could find a place for herself where she should receive wages and not be nearly so much of a servant, yet the Judge decided that was “providing for her with the meaning of the law.” The support that a man must according to law give his wife, would be a joke if it were not a tragedy.”

Alberta Labour Annual

Because the work of the married woman, in caring for her household, was supposed to be a labor of love, and of no economic value . . . women were at first content to sell their work at far below its real value, and thus depress the wage scale for all workers. Today women have proved themselves capable of entering many fields of labor, manual and intellectual, in which men work, and their demand for equal opportunity, and equal pay for equal work is being more and more recognised. Until it is fully recognised, women's work will always have a tendency to hold down the standard of wages, and displace men . . . Perhaps no group of women have suffered more from this condition of affairs than the Farm women. Certainly no group of women has labored so hard so ungrudgingly and so unselfishly. And yet we know for a fact that in many instances, not even the produce that they raise by their own labor, can be sold and claimed as their own. Can such a humiliating condition be conducive to a happy married life, or a right environment in which to bring up children? And it is not so uncommon a condition as might be supposed. Our law is little or no protection to the married women; the Dower Act is of little value. The Community Property Act introduced at the last session was the embryo from which some satisfactory legislation may result. Modern conditions must be faced, and the wife must not be placed in an inferior economic position to the unmarried woman, because she gives herself to the valuable and important work of caring for home and family.

Bill No. 54 of 1925: An Act Establishing
Community Property as between
Husband and Wife. . . .

3. All property of the husband (or wife) owned by him (or her) before marriage and that acquired afterward by gift . . . shall be his (or her) separate property . . .

5. All other property acquired by either husband or wife, or both, during the marriage, including the rents and profits of the separate property of the husband and wife, shall be community property. . . .

8. The husband shall have the management and control of the community property with the like absolute power of disposition, other than testamentary, over community personal property as he has of his separate estate; but he shall not sell, convey or encumber the community real estate unless the wife joins with him in executing the instrument of conveyance. . . .

—from a bill introduced into the Alberta Legislature in 1925, but never passed into law.