

Annual Address
before
The Des Moines Woman's Club
by
Martha C. Callanan,
President,
September 28. 1887.

A N N U A L A D D R E S S

before

T H E D E S M O I N E S W O M A N ' S C L U B

-by-

M A R T H A C . C A L L A N A N ,

President.

September 28th, 1887.

LADIES:

We meet this afternoon to inaugurate the third year of the existence of the Des Moines Woman's Club.

It seems like an oriental tale, of the impossible to assert- that the many Associations, Clubs, Circles, and Societies of women, whether formed for church, literary, social or philanthropic purposes, now so numerous, have all come into being within the past half century. Yet such is the fact.

The first record we find of women associating themselves under regulations made by themselves and for their exclusive benefit, is in the year 1840. Early in that year the girls of Lowell, Mass. working in the factories, formed what they called an "Improvement Circle". They met once in two weeks. The entertainment was the reading of communications written by themselves. In October of that year, these Lowell girls published the "Lowell Offering", the first magazine ever edited and published by women.

The contents consisted of selections from the budget of articles which had been read at their "Circle".

We next hear of a convention called at Seneca Falls, N.Y. on the 19th and 20th of July, 1848, to discuss the "social, civil and religious" condition of woman. Its discussions occupied two entire days, the first day the speakers being women exclusively. A declaration of sentiments or rights was adopted, and a series of resolutions were ~~adopted~~ ^{passed}. The declaration of rights declared, among many other things, that all men and women are created equal." The resolutions were numerous, and while I would like to call your attention to several of them, I have made a note of but two, which are as follows:

RESOLVED; "That the equality of human rights results necessarily

from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities."

RESOLVED: "That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live that they may no longer publish their degradation, by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance by asserting that they have all the rights they want."

This convention at Seneca Falls created much stir among thinking people and caused wide-spread comment.

The girls at Lowell had quietly met in their "Circles", had published their own magazine and sought self-culture. The convention at Seneca Falls was heralded by a public Call in newspapers having the widest circulation and its proceedings were reported by them. It demanded changes in laws and in the generally accepted position of woman. It sought her good, and through her that of the whole human family. It moved for a concert of action to secure changes in the laws affecting women in many of their rights, especially the right of holding property, and demanded that they have a direct voice in making these changes. The newspaper world called the members and those taking part in it "cranks" the thoughtless laughed, but the better disposed pondered the subject in wiser mood. One of the results was that changes were inaugurated and have been gradually made in the laws affecting woman's position; in laws that had been a deep disgrace to the statistics of a civilized people, but with all the changes that have been made, many still remain that should be remedied.

The next foot-print upon the dial-plate of time that marks an added step toward woman's emancipation occurred in 1868. Twenty years had passed since the convention at Seneca Falls. The girls of '48

have matured. They have become the matrons of '68 and many of them have managed by some means to get an education. For the education of girls was not considered necessary in those early days. And in those primitive days girls had to edge their way into the schools. They had also learned of fathers, of brothers and were self-taught. Some of them were teachers; a few had become journalists; others were daintily edging around and managing to get a taste of the sweets of artistic and scientific knowledge.

The conference of the few earnest spirits at Seneca Falls in 1848, the declaration of sentiments there adopted, the resolutions passed, had been the sowing of seed out of which grew in this 1868, a generation later, the first incorporation of an association of women. There had, however, in the mean time, been a number of Equal Rights Societies formed, in which women had been associated with some of the noble-minded men of that day, who^{ich} had been steadily working for woman's elevation and advancement.

The Articles of Incorporation of this Woman's Association, stated its objects to be "the promotion of agreeable and useful relations among women: the discussion and dissemination of principles and facts which promise to exert a salutary influence on women and on society, and the establishment of an order which shall render the female sex helpful to each other and actively benevolent in the world."

The name by which it was known was Sorosis. It was the celebrate woman's club of New York city. You will pardon me, Ladies, if I here digress a moment to speak of the derivation of the word "Sorosis" as from its appropriateness it interested me much. It may be familiar to you, but was not known to me, until I found it with its various and interesting definitions in the manuel of the Society.

"Sorosis" is derived from the Greek word, Soureusis, an aggregation. Its French equivalent is Sorose. Sorosis (is defined in Henslow's

Dictionary of Botanical terms) as a compound, fleshy fruit, formed by the close aggregation of many flowers, whose floral whorls become succulent, and in Cook's Manuel of Botanical terms, "as a compound fleshy fruit resulting from many flowers." The pine-apple, the fig, the bread-fruit and the mulberry are such fruits.

It is evident that Sorosis had a mission; a mission that existed in the hearts of its founders-- women of ability in literature, science and philanthropy. The fact of women organizing themselves in a club, was generally commented on and criticised in private circles. By the public it was viewed with apprehension as a dangerous innovation, and the newspapers treated it with ridicule or indignation, declaring it an unheard of thing-- that women should presume to associate themselves in a Society for any purpose whatever.

The first article of the constitution of Sorosis, stated its object to be, "to bring together women engaged in literary, artistic, scientific and philanthropic pursuits, with the view of rendering them helpful to each other and useful to society." Its second, declared that the Association shall encourage a liberal interchange of thought among its members, by written essays and verbal discussions upon all subjects that pertain to its object, and shall endeavor to make practical the ideas thus evolved."

The formation of the New York Club was followed by that of others, generally for self-culture, sometimes for philanthropic purposes, and some with a view to obtaining political equality, in the belief that this would more rapidly and effectually remedy the evils women were seeking to lessen. The latter, however, usually admitted men as members.

It only required five years of education in Sorosis, the first formed as also the leading club among women, for some of the advanced

thinkers and workers in it, to become convinced of the value that some form of concerted national action among them would be to woman's advancement; and in 1873, a committee was empowered to issue the following messenger:

"The necessity of fellowship and concerted action among women interested in the advancement of the race, and more especially of their own sex, is so apparent, that we do not hesitate to assert that by far the larger portion of our efforts in that direction are fruitless, because they are solitary and isolated.

Thousands of noble and beneficent women scattered all over our country, are today thinking, writing and speaking the truths which all women need, and many are waiting to hear, and which would at once be a renovating force in the land, if the believers could, in a congregated body, unite upon practical methods for their incorporation into government, business and social life.

Therefore, in consideration of the present demand for unity of method among women interested in like objects, Sorosis whose purpose is to render women helpful to each other and useful to society, has determined to take the preliminary steps for bringing the representative women of the country together in a Woman's Congress, that unitedly we may take into careful consideration the more important questions that affect our woman's life."

A call was promised as soon as sufficient encouragement should be received. To this there was a hearty response-- and the Call was accordingly issued-- to meet, as they said, a pressing demand for interchange of thought and harmony of action among women. The Call stated, that they were assured of the attendance of a goodly number of the "pre-eminently talented, cultivated, and beneficent women, who, by means

of higher education, broader fields of industry, better laws, artistic and scientific pursuits, business discipline, and an enlightened motherhood, hoped to remove the sources of misery and cure the evils that so many of our benevolent women spend their lives in ameliorating."

It was my good fortune to be in attendance at this first congress of women, and the impression left on me will not easily be effaced. It was held at the Union League Theater in New York City, the resident members of Sorosis entertaining the congress and attending its sessions, which were crowded with the most intelligent audiences with which it has ever been my experience to meet. Mary A. Livermore presided and papers of much merit and upon a diversity of subjects were read and discussed.

It had been understood that woman's advancement was the point to be urged, and a few had supposed that she could make such advancement without political equality; these few were probably disenchanted by the end of the sessions, as no one question received more attention, or more unqualified approval, than the one embodying the necessity for women being empowered with the rights of citizenship, that would come to her by way of the ballot.

This was in 1873, and since that time, sessions of the congress have, each year, been held in some city of the Union. At these times the proceedings have been very fully reported by the press: the visiting officers and members have been handsomely entertained and many invitations have been extended to them to visit Reformatory Institutions and places of local interest. Among the highly appreciated of these have been trips to the Dalles of the Wisconsin and ^{to} Niagara Falls: to Boston harbor and its penal institutions, and to the White Mountains, etc.

It is a notable fact that wherever the congress has been held and the aims of the Association have thus become better known, its objects have so commended it to the thoughtful and progressive that societies and

clubs have sprung up that are accomplishing much good. Two years ago its sessions were held in this city, and immediately following it, this club was formed. It was stated at the time that its object was to create an organized center of thought and action among women." In practice it has ~~been~~ largely ^{been} literary, amounting almost to a system of self-culture, to the exclusion of ought else. And this is undoubtedly the best foundation for successful future work, whether for the individual or the public.

A committee, however, of inquiry and investigation from the club during its first season, resulted in the establishment of a woman's exchange. It was incorporated and has a constitution and corps of officers, and last winter, after a discussion that followed the reading of a paper "on the comparative value of different modes of education", a committee was appointed to prepare an appeal to our local School Board, asking for the establishment of a department to teach sewing in the public schools. The appeal was prepared, approved by the club and presented to the School Board. In presenting it, the committee were courteously received; a number of questions asked and answered and the promise given that it should receive due attention. In conversation, since that time, with members of the Board and others conversant with the situation, I am assured that there is good prospect of its success, and that this important industry will soon be a part of our course of public instruction. The tendency of the times is in the direction of practical education and we will be glad, if as a club we have helped more than we could have done personally, to forward the establishing of this desirable ~~public~~ instruction for our public school children.

The axiom is an old one that "in union there is strength." One of the wise men among the ancients, wishing to illustrate this idea, took a single rod and broke it, then another and broke it. He then bound a number of the same kind of rods together, and they were too

strong to be broken by the strength of one man. A beautiful application of this conception is shown in the building of wire suspension bridges. We are probably none of us so young, as not to remember the interest attached to the first effort to bridge Niagara river below the Falls. The discussions, the doubts that were expressed of its success: and with what anxiety we watched for the reports of the efforts that were made to pass the first wire over the seething, foaming river, with its deep, swift current, running between perpendicular banks. And how, when the feat was accomplished, and that first wire was passed from bank to bank, it was so weak that there were serious doubts, if its strength would support its weight until another could be gotten over and bound to it. But another wire was securely taken over, and the two were joined, and then another, and another, and they were bound each to the other, first in ropes, and ~~then~~ the ropes were bound to other ropes and cables were formed, and so a bridge was made, and all with the tiny wires; but so strong that it bears the passage of the heaviest ^{rail-road} trains. ~~upon the railroad.~~

This system of a union of wires in bridge-building embodies and illustrates the theory and benefits of organization. The wires are the individuals, bringing them together in clusters, binding them, and passing them over the piers, and fastening them to the anchors, is the machinery, the constitution and bylaws of the organization. The material of the wire is the mettle of the individual members, and the anchors, strong, heavy and not to be moved, the perfected discipline of the Society.

Men have taken advantage of this kind of ^{massing and} association from the earliest times; and by so doing, have accomplished much that could not otherwise have been done. Notably in warfare and in governments. Armies have been powerful in proportion to their numbers, the intelligence of their leaders, and the discipline maintained in them. Governments strong

as the governing power and the people, have been wise, frugal, industrious and complete in organization.

The records of sacred history inform us that woman was originally placed in the Garden of Eden with the same rights, the same privileges, the same responsibilities as man. That thirsting for knowledge, she was beguiled into over-stepping the regulations governing that small kingdom. That she was joined by her husband in her disobedient acts, and both were driven forth, apparently upon equal terms, to combat the evil and labor for the good and desirable outside of Paradise.

The early history of the world is involved in much obscurity. But the pages of ecclesiastical and profane history give glimpses, occasionally, of some prominent woman, usually of superior mold, whose light has shown beyond the environments of her home life.

We have heard of Miriam with songs still sweet after the lapse of thousands of years. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, the politician of that period. Rachel, worthy to hold the steadfast affections of Jacob through twice seven years, and crowning the marital relation where love was reciprocal, by the glory of a motherhood that gave to Israel a Joseph, grand above the other men of his time and savior of his people in the days of their greatest need.

Abigail who, had she lived in these latter days, would have been criticised as strong-minded, but in her day, was rewarded by a marriage with the king.

Deborah, a prophetess and both warrior and statesman: Esther, of whom it was asked, "who knoweth but that thou camest into the kingdom for such a time as this." Naomi, Ruth and many others. Later, many women are spoken of as followers of Christ and workers in the church. The wife of Pilate, a heathen woman, was so impressed with the injustice of

the accusations against the Savior, that she made herself conspicuous by sending a message to her husband regarding the subject awaiting his decision when he sat on the judgment seat. And Saphira^k who for a like crime, was punished equally with Annanias. Indeed, we find no where in God's sacred word, any distinction because of sex in God's rewards or punishments.

Later in the world's history, we have the account of a Venitian lady, more learned in the law than the men of her period; of Isabella of Castile, far-seeing even to the pledging her jewels for the venture of finding a new world. Joan of Arc, the victorious leader of the armies of her country; and of a number of Sovereigns, as Catherine of Russia, Marie Therese of Austria and Elisabeth of England, successful beyond the average of the kings and emperors who reigned during the same periods. Later still, Victoria of England has already completed her half-century of Queen-ship, and while bearing the sceptre of her kingdom, its duties and responsibilities, she has at the same time been a model, loving wife, an inconsolable widow, a careful pains-taking mother to a numerous family and besides has written a book and it is said, is writing another. (And yet it is whispered that she is a woman of but average ability.)

But these, as workers, all were women, each standing alone in her place, or their efforts were connected with those of men, helping to forward the same measures which have ever kept man in supremacy.

While woman ~~was~~ the reigning monarch, and possessing the same power that a man would have possessed had a man been sovereign, ^{has shown at least equal ability} it seems never to have entered the brain of either sex, that men and women, could hold the same position, an equal position as subjects, ^{equally} ~~as~~ well as when they were sovereigns. But women were without organization, and continued to be so until within the present half-century. Though slow in moving in this respect at first, they have been apt learners as the rapid increase

of the number of their organizations will show. The membership to each of these may be small. Many are church societies for missionary work, whose field embraces work for both sexes; or for helping to pay church debts or towards church support; and these often, have a way of leaning as helpers toward some society managed by men: But even these are educational and we are glad of them. The young bird must plume its wings before it can fly.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union is at this time, undoubtedly the largest and best organized of all exclusively women organizations, though the first thought of bringing it into being was only conceived after the Ohio Crusade against the liquor traffic, about a dozen years ago. It not only has a footing in every state in the Union, but extends to Canada, England and even around the world. Its many departments of work, over thirty in number, fit it to meet the needs of every woman, who is willing to do ought for the mitigation of evil, or the righting of wrong. And just here, with your permission, I will express my regret that the ladies of this city are so little acquainted with the opportunities it opens for humanitarian work and that the Union here may have a new growth in numbers and influence.

The A. A. W., that is, The Association for the Advancement of Women, is probably the second in size of any exclusively women's associations, in the extent of the territory influenced. But the A. A. W. has a membership of individuals only. The clubs that are its out-growth are left isolated. The A. A. W. furnished no machinery to bind them to it. Even their objects may be diverse, and if diverse they could not be bound in one harmonious whole. But we feel like asking, why they should be diverse? It is a source of weakness to act separately; of strength to be united. The A. A. W. probably builded better than it knew. It did not

realize the excessive hunger of woman for the companionship that would advance her woman interests, the many clubs that would spring up in its pathway.

The object of the A. A. W. is stated as being "to consider and present practical methods for securing to women higher intellectual, moral and physical conditions, with a view to the improvement of all domestic and social relations." This object is surely worthy our efforts to further. And its motto, truth--justice--honor-- could it be improved?

I would like to suggest that whenever we find that there is unanimity of sentiment among our members, favorable to making the stated objects of our club conform to that of the A. A. W., ^{for in reality} they have ever been much the same, that we shall make the change. This will bring us nearer the parent Society though the link that binds us be invisible, and at some Congress not many years hence, we may be bound by the actual tie of kinship.

You have heard that I believe in combination. At this period in history, it would seem as if women were waiting for it, though it may be that perhaps none of us have ^{yet} awakened to a full knowledge of its value. But a study of our laws affecting women; a knowledge of the fact that mothers are not the legal guardians of their own children, and an interchange of opinions on the great questions of the day, will rouse new thoughts, will intensify their ~~the~~ love of liberty, and help to give a realizing sense of their ~~the~~ value and need of organization..

Women as they come to realize the disparity between their labor and its reward, as compared to the recompense men receive for the same labor, should learn to apply the lesson.

The condition of women in one place affects their condition in every place. By a more perfect combination of purpose, ^{an} organizing

of effort, and a more complete recognition of the subtile and binding ties of a universal sisterhood, woman should and will be in a position to command respectful attention to her wishes.

Then as she is true to herself, will the honor and justice be accorded her, and the motto of the A. A. W. "truth--justice--honor" not only be inscribed upon the outer temple but be implanted in the hearts of her children.
