

The Parasite Woman

The Only Indispensable Citizen

By Theodore Roosevelt

OF all species of silliness the silliest is the assertion sometimes made that the woman

whose primary life-work is taking care of her home and children is somehow a "parasite woman." It is such a ridiculous inversion of the truth that it ought not to be necessary even to allude to it. Nevertheless, it is acted upon by a large number of selfish, brutal or thoughtless men, and it is screamed about by a number of foolish women. Therefore a word of common sense on the matter may not be out of place.

There are men so selfish, so short-sighted or so brutal, that they speak and act as if the fact of the man's earning money for his wife and children, while the woman bears the children, rears them and takes care of the house for them and for the man, somehow entitles the man to be known as the head of the family, instead of a partner on equal terms with his wife, and entitles him to the exclusive right to dispose of the money and, as a matter of fact, to dispose of it primarily in his own interest.

THERE are professional feminists and so-called woman's rights women who, curiously enough, seem to accept so much of this male attitude as implies that the partner who earns the money is the superior partner and that therefore the woman, who is physically weaker than the man, should accept as her primary duty the rivaling of him in money-making business; and they stigmatize as parasites the women who do the one great and all-essential work, without which no other activity by either sex amounts to anything.

Apply common sense and common decency to both attitudes. It is entirely right that any woman should be allowed to make any career for herself of which she is capable, whether or not it is a career followed by a man. She has the same right to be a lawyer, a doctor, a farmer or a storekeeper that the man has to be a poet, an explorer, a politician or a painter. There are women whose peculiar circumstances or whose peculiar attributes render it advisable that they should follow one of the professions named, just as there are men who can do most good to their fellows by following one of the careers above indicated for men. More than this. It is indispensable that such careers shall be open to women and that certain women shall follow them, if the women of a country, and therefore if the country itself, expect any development. In just the same way, it is indispensable that some men shall be explorers, artists, sculptors, literary men, politicians, if the country is to have its full life. Some of the best farmers are women just as some of the best exploring work and scientific work has been done by women. There is a real need for a certain number of women doctors and women lawyers. Whether a writer or a painter or a singer is a man or a woman makes not the slightest difference, provided that the work he or she does is good.

All this I not merely admit; I insist upon it. But surely it is a mere statement of fact to add that the primary work of the average man and the average woman—and of all exceptional men and women whose lives are to be really full and happy—must be the great primal work of home-making and home-keeping, for themselves and their children.

THE primary work of the man is to earn his own livelihood and the livelihood of those dependent upon him, to do his own business, whether his business is on a farm or in a shop, in the counting-room of a bank or the engine-cab of a train, in a mine or on a fishing-boat, at the head of a telegraph or telephone line, whether he be an engineer or an inventor, a surgeon or a carpenter or a brakeman. In other words, the man must do his business and do it well in order to support himself and his wife and children and in order that the nation may continue to exist. I appreciate to the full the work of the politician, the poet, the sculptor and the explorer; and yet it is mere common sense to say that they cannot do any work at all unless their average fellow-

countryman does his business, whether with hand or brain, pen or pick, in such fashion that the country is on a decent industrial basis. If it is not, nobody will have any house or anything to eat or any means of getting around; and therefore there won't be any poets or politicians. This is not exalting one class at the expense of another. On the contrary, it recognizes the absolute need from the standpoint of national greatness and permanent achievement, that there shall be some men in a state the worth of whose activities cannot be and is not measured or expressed by money. But there is also the absolute need that this shall not be true of the average man—and, as a matter of fact, it is a great deal better even if it is not true of the exceptional man—if, in addition to his non-remunerative work, he is able by his activities to pay his way as he goes.

Now, this also applies to women. Exceptional women—like Julia Ward Howe or Harriet Beecher Stowe or Mme. Homer—are admirable wives and mothers, admirable keepers of the home, and yet workers of genius outside the home. Such types of course are rare whether among men or women. There are also exceptional—and less happy, and normally less useful—women whose best service to the state and community as a whole are rendered outside the home, just as is true of exceptional—and normally less happy and less useful—men. But exactly as it is true that no nation will prosper unless the average man is a home-maker; that is, unless at some business or trade or profession, he earns enough to make a home for himself and his wife and children, and is a good husband and father, so no nation can exist at all unless the average woman is the home-keeper, the good wife, and unless she is the mother of a sufficient number of healthy children to insure the race going forward and not backward. The indispensable work for the community is the work of the wife and the mother. It is the most honorable work. It is literally and exactly the vital work, the work which of course must be done by the average woman or the whole nation goes down with a crash.

FOOLISH men treat this fact as warranting them in all kinds of outeries against what they call "unwomanly" activities, including the outcry against the "higher education." This is nonsense. The woman is entitled to just as much education as the man; and it will not hurt her one particle more than it hurts the man. It may hurt a fool in either case; but no one else. However, justification is given these people who cry against the "higher education" by such utterances as those made the other day by a president of a women's college who fatuously announced, in advocacy of a small birthrate, that it was better to have one child brought up in the best way than several not thus brought up. In the first place, there is no such antithesis as is thus implied, for, as a matter of fact, children in a family of children are usually better brought up than the only child, or than the child of a two-child family. In the next place, the statement, which must of course be taken to apply to the average individual, is on its face false, and the woman making it is not only unfit to be at the head of a female college, but is not fit to teach the lowest class in a kindergarten, for such teaching is not merely folly, but a peculiarly repulsive type of mean and selfish wickedness. The one-child family as an average ideal of course spells death; and death means the end of all hope. It is only while there is life that there is hope. A caste or a race or a nation, where the average family consists of one child, faces immediate extinction, and therefore it matters not one particle how this child is brought up. But if there are plenty of children then there is always hope. Even if they have not been very well brought up, they have been brought up; and so there is something to work on.

Just as the prime work for the average man must be earning his livelihood and the livelihood of those dependent upon him, so the prime work

for the average woman must be keeping the home and bearing and rearing her children. This woman is not a parasite

on society. She is society. She is the one indispensable component part of society. Socially, the same standard of moral obligation applies both to her and to the man; and in addition she is entitled to all the chivalry of love and tenderness and reverence, if in gallant and fearless fashion she faces the risk and wearing labor entailed by her fulfillment of duty; but if she shirks her duty she is entitled to no more consideration than the man who shirks his. Unless she does her duty, the whole social system collapses. If she does her duty, she is entitled to all honor.

THIS last statement is the crucial statement. The one way to honor this indispensable woman, the wife and mother, is to insist that she be treated as the full equal of her husband. The birth pangs make all men the debtors of all women; and the man is a wretched creature who does not live up to this obligation. Marriage should be a real partnership; a partnership of the soul, the spirit and the mind, no less than of the body. An immediately practical feature of this partnership should be the full acknowledgment that the woman who keeps the home has exactly the same right to a say in the disposal of the money as the man who earns the money. Earning the money is not one whit more indispensable than keeping the home. Indeed, I am inclined to put it in the second place. The husband who does not give his wife, as a matter of right, her share in the disposal of the common funds is false to his duty. It is not a question of favor at all. Aside from the money to be spent on common account, for the household and the children, the wife has just the same right as the husband to her pin money, her spending money. It is not his money that he gives to her as a gift. It is hers as a matter of right. He may earn it; but he earns it because she keeps the house; and she has just as much right to it as he has. This is not a hostile right; it is a right which it is every woman's duty to ask and which it should be every man's pride and pleasure to give without asking. He is a poor creature if he grudges it; and she in her turn is a poor creature if she does not insist upon her rights, just exactly as she is worse than a poor creature if she does not do her duty.

It is the men who insist upon women doing their full duty, who insist that the primary duty of the woman is in the home, who also have a right to insist that she is just as much entitled to the suffrage as is the man. We believe in equality of right, not in identity of functions. The woman must bear and rear the children, as her first duty to the state; and the man's first duty is to take care of her and the children. In neither case is it the exclusive duty. In neither case does it exclude the performance of other duties. The right to vote no more implies that a woman will neglect her home than that a man will neglect his business. Indeed, as regards one of the greatest and most useful of all professions, that of surgery and medicine, it is probably true that the average doctor's wife has more time for the performance of political duties than the average doctor himself.

THERE was a capital article recently in *The Britannia*, the official organ of the Women's Social and Political Union in England, by Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst. She was urging the full performance of duty in the war both by men and by women. In it she denounced the laboring men who did not whole-heartedly do everything in their power to aid the cause of England in the war. She spoke of the fact that workmen and women in France could not understand how there could be strikes among workers in England during the war. She insisted that the prime duty during the war was for the men and women alike to put aside all other grievances and make common cause on behalf of the nation, and then to try to make the country a better one for their children to live in. It was a capital article, and it should be read by men and

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women here just as much as by men and women in England. It is because I believe that the American woman will in time of need and when the facts are brought home to her take such a position as Mrs. Pankhurst has thus taken, that I emphatically believe that she should have the right just as much as the man to vote, and, what is even more important, that she shall be given her full rights in connection with the performance by her as wife and mother of those indispensable duties which make her the one absolutely indispensable citizen of this republic.

I end as I began by speaking of the good woman who is the best of all good citizens. I speak of goodness in the largest sense, as implying also wisdom and courage—for the woman who is either a fool or a coward is not a really useful member of the commonwealth. I ask that we search our hearts, that we cast aside selfish sloth and craven love of ease, and dare to live nobly and bravely. I make my appeal to all the good and wise and brave men and women of our Republic. I make it in the name of the larger Americanism, which means fealty to the highest national ideal. I speak for those who greatly prize peace, but who prize duty and justice and honor even more than peace. I believe in that ardent patriotism which will

make a nation true to itself by making it secure justice for all within its own borders, and then so far as may be, aid in every way in securing just and fair treatment for all the nations of mankind. I believe that the people of the United States have in them the power to rise to the level of their needs, their opportunities and their obligations. But they can only do so if they face the facts, however unpleasant. For some years we have as a people shown an appalling unfitness for world leadership on behalf of the democratic ideal; for, especially during the last three years, we have played a mean and sordid part among the nations, and have been faithless to our obligations and to all the old-time ideals of American patriotism. We can tolerate among our own people no divided allegiance. We must prepare at once in amplest fashion to defend ourselves against outside aggression from any source. Then in addition to striving for material well-being and reasonable equality of opportunity for our own people, in addition to making ready to defend our own rights with our own strength, surely the heirs of Washington and Lincoln must, as regards the rest of the world, stand at any cost for justice and righteousness for and among the peoples and the nations of mankind.