

# "Womanly Ambition."

*AN ADDRESS*

—BY—

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# WOMANLY AMBITION.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

Love of glory is the universal passion of mankind. It is the actuating principle in every grand achievement, and in modified degree it prompts the lowly as it stirs the great.

The desire of power and influence, the love of praise, the struggle for eminence, the emulation to outdo others that honor and distinction among men may follow, may all be summed up in the word, ambition.

The effect of this passion upon individual life and character is of infinite diversity, and varies with the innate disposition and the external circumstances of every human being. Action and motive are often discordant. Persons intend one thing, and find they have done another; desire one fate, and have to accept another; plan out one life, and have to live another. And yet for all this, the soul that is resolute performs so many exploits that savor of impossibility, that those who wish to do something grand in the world find more force in what they wish than what they know. The wishes of the heart put brain and hand to work. The intellect is dormant until the feelings call its contriving powers into exercise. Thought succeeds to impulse. Action follows thought. Results follow action. Success smiles only on persistent toil and vigilance. Thus is the record made up of human achievement, and thus the cherished ambition of any life goes far to shape its career and fix its destiny.

When ambition springs from proper motives it is laudable, and stimulates all the faculties to their loftiest energy. When it ema-

nates from selfish greed for advantage over others, it is satanic. The one is true. The other false. The one has been said to raise mortals to the skies. The other to drag angels down.

Ambition, in its charitable sense, is consistent with every womanly attribute.

The wish to attain excellence, the desire to confer blessings and to earn gratitude, the holy aspiration to be goodly great and greatly good, are the noblest incentives that can actuate a soul. These incentives have belonged to women, as to men, ever since the world began, and will so continue as long as the world may last. Side by side in the lists of the truly great, the names of illustrious women vie with those of distinguished men, both in war and peace. In statesmanship, diplomacy, philosophy, literature, science and art—as ruler, as teacher, as poet—in all the loftier planes of intellectual attainment, women of genius have left as enduring monuments of greatness as the men. In our own day, the sculptor, the author, the orator, and the king, win no fairer renown than the sculptress, the authoress, the oratress, and the queen. It is, therefore, fair to assume that, in intellect, woman is the equal of man, and if there are distinctions between manly and womanly ambition, they consist rather in the quality than in the quantity of characteristic force.

Men love power for the sake of dominion; women for the sake of splendor. Men demand obedience; women admiration. Men seize the sword, women the scepter. Men conquer that they may rule; women that they may reign. Man is ambitious to give battle; woman to be supreme in the hearts of her people. Men like to be formidable abroad; women to be beloved at home. Men fight for fame; women shrink from reproach. Men glory in their strength; women in their delicacy and refinement. Men study self-promotion; women the promotion of those they love. Man's ambition is to subdue; woman's to please. Man's ambition revels in the triumphs of the world; but the ambition of a true woman is consecrated to God.

Semiramis leading the Assyrian hosts; Zenobia at the head of her army, making armed protest against the ruin of her beloved Palmyra by the mailed legions of Rome; Joan d'Arc inspiring the drooping defenders of France against the victorious English; and

Marie Antoinette enduring the awful terrors of execution with sublime fortitude, are historical instances among thousands that could be named, to prove that women are as exalted in their courage and their heroism as men.

Every-day life points to the same conclusion. The statistics of the census show that where numbers are about equal, women possess more moral courage and fortitude than men. Man pleads, as his excuse for intemperance and crime, that he is poor, that he is wretched, that he is tempted. But woman, equally poor, equally wretched, equally tempted, resists the temptation, and does not yield to intemperance and crime.

The police reports show the cringing slaves of intemperance are mostly men. The criminal records show that nearly all the criminals are men. Intellectually man's equal, morally his superior, woman's ambition is purer, nobler, and more truly heroic.

There are occasions when to be patient is to be great; to be silent is to be heroic; to be uncomplaining partakes of the sublime. It is on such occasions that the average woman is superior to the average man, and that the truly great women furnish evidences of character so exalted that they seem to rise above the human, and to become angelic in their natures. There may be, therefore, a womanly ambition to excel in those admirable characteristics which are beyond the capabilities of man, and in which she is by nature his superior. On the other hand, there are many things right enough in themselves which a woman of refinement cannot engage in without compromising her sense of delicacy. A true woman has an innate modesty that holds in subjection every wish of her heart. Men may seek notoriety as the prelude to more enduring fame. A woman cannot do this, and with sublime resignation, many a woman who knows within her soul that she is great, shrinks from celebrity and lives for those she loves. Nay, more: she is content to let them wear the bays that might have crowned her own brow. Many a man achieves fortune through the sound sense of his wife. Many a man has been made illustrious on brain capital furnished by a woman. But for Aspasia, Pericles would never have established that republic of letters which gave to Greece its golden age; but for Isabella, Columbus would never have discovered America; but

for Malinchi, Cortez would never have conquered Mexico ; but for Miss Dent, Ulysses Grant would never have been President of the United States.

Almost every illustrious man who ever lived became distinguished by following the advice of some sensible woman, and many of these same men fell from their highest estate by sinning against her better judgment and purer intellectuality.

Woe be to the man who dares trample her under his feet !

Alexander the Great, Tarquin, Julius Cæsar, Napoleon and Byron are examples of warning to mankind that the greatest cannot escape destruction if they sin against woman's better promptings or reject her counsel. And our own beloved Washington points the moral of maintaining a proper deference for her true worth and intellectual power ; and in nearly every household in the land the sweet, placid face of Martha Washington smiles from the same wall along with the Father of his Country. She never dreamed of such renown as this, but did her duty, and gave her advice and managed her estate in good womanly fashion for the sake of a better reward than fame—the approval of her own conscience, the advancement of her husband's interests and the hope of that eternal crown reserved for the chosen of God.

Women are often ambitious to have influence in directions that render them unhappy. They wish to be lawyers and doctors, and preachers and newspaper reporters, etc. Some of them do very well, too. But in aspiring to eminence in such pursuits a woman throws away her chances of best success, and gives up her greatest power. She is heiress to the crown in the social kingdom. Her highest supremacy can be reached in those fields of usefulness which tend to make homes happy. There is no such thing as a paradise on earth without a pure, good woman as its ruling spirit—its gentle law-giver, regulating its peace by the wonderful harmonies of love and sympathy.

There are a great many little kingdoms called homes. Unless they are governed by the power of woman's rule, they are dreary places. Without her taste, her care, her skill, palaces and cottages are but miserable under whatever government man can devise.

It is woman's proud office to govern and to sanctify home, and to make its influence sacred.

The young and the aged look to her gentle hand for tenderness, and the strong and the weary look to her for rest. Instinctively she loves truth. Naturally she recoils from dishonor, and by tradition she preserves the fidelity, the honest pride and the priceless decencies of the family fireside.

There is no field for womanly ambition so suited to her natural genius as excellence in domestic pursuits.

“Honor and fame from no condition rise ;  
Act well your part—there all the honor lies.”

Ambition, to be wholesome in its effects, should be within bounds and conformable to the situation and circumstances of the individual. It must be directed in channels of common sense and possibility. Not only mental, but physical, endowments must be taken into account. Persons capable of attaining distinction as poets might fail as mechanics. The accidents of birth, station, property, relationship to others, and the times in which one lives, must all be reconcilable with the object to be accomplished.

In reading the story of any remarkable life, what little things seem to have occasioned the great ones! Through what years of patient obscurity most of the famous were disciplined!

Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb  
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar.  
Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime  
Hath felt the influence of malignant star,  
And waged with fortune an eternal war!

Sometimes persons are great in one direction, and ambitious in another. Sound judgment should always be consulted, or ambition becomes ridiculous. It would be out of place for a woman to be a blacksmith or a stage-driver. A woman's ambition should prompt her to endeavor to excel in those things for which she is adapted. I have seen a little girl put on her mother's dress, and peep over her shoulder to see how she looked wearing a train. Some grown-up persons are as absurd in earnest as this little child in fun. A woman has to consider not only what she *can* do, but what would be proper and becoming for her to do. She should never loose her

good taste. It is, therefore, most important for a woman who has ambition not to mistake her work.

This brings us to consider, what is womanly work? The question is sometimes right difficult to answer. It depends a good deal on circumstances. It may become *necessary*, in the life of any woman, to earn an honest living in the world. Too little attention is paid by parents and educators to this important contingency.

It is too often taken for granted, that if a girl be fair, and winsome, and intelligent, she need never trouble herself about it. And yet it is worthy her most serious consideration. It is the fashion for mothers to have a false, pernicious ambition for their daughters to have worthless hands, and haughty hearts; bent upon making display in what is *called* the best society, and to repel the thought that these girls may ever have to depend upon themselves. It is a cruel wrong, this false ambition of mothers. Cruel to themselves, and still more cruel to their daughters. True ambition and true kindness alike dictate that every girl, no matter what her station, should be carefully instructed in some useful industry for which there is a market demand, and by which an honest support can be made. I hesitate to lift the veil of reality to bright young eyes before me. But scarcely a day passes in the office of any business man in our larger cities that some young lady does not come with lamentations that she has been compelled by changes in the fortunes of those she depended upon to go forth in the world to struggle for subsistence. She is told to teach school. "Alas! sir, I am not thorough enough in anything to teach. I cannot get a situation over graduates of the Normal School." She is told to sew. "Alas! I have never been taught to sew; I cannot even make my own dresses. I cannot compete with girls trained to sew, and they almost starve at it." She is told to learn millinery. "Alas! to learn that requires time and money, and I have neither. Apprentices are not paid even their board." She is told to copy manuscripts. "Alas! there is no bread in that. What little there is in that line is absorbed by expert penmen, who work rather for employment than for pay." She is told to seek a situation as nurse or house-girl. "Sir, I have been tenderly raised. Raised as a

lady, and the equal of any one. I cannot consent to be reduced to servitude."

And the misguided ambition of the mother shines through eyes that are full of tears—tears of agony, tears that would never have flowed if the mother had done her duty and taught the girl to work.

So this girl—educated as the fashion goes; accomplished, as it is falsely called; worthless, in fact, for the grand mission of self-preservation, comes to grief and must seek refuge in a distasteful marriage, or humiliating dependence upon those to whom she is a burden.

True ambition would raise every girl so as to make an independent support for herself, if necessity should demand it. Nay, more, to direct her energies in some useful occupation that will enlist her mind, as well as her hand, circumscribe her leisure hours, absorb her time, limit her wishes, keep her out of mischief and aloof from temptation.

It is a crying evil and a shame in this country that girls should not be better prepared for changes of fortune by being taught to work; and not merely taught to work, but trained to work at something that will earn bread.

This may be plain, perhaps unpleasant, talk, but there are few very secure fortunes in this country, and I have seen the daughter of a millionaire reduced to poverty, deserted by her husband for no fault of hers, living upon the charity of her former slaves.

When such transmutations are possible, what security is there for the daughters of aristocrats, worth from five to ten thousand dollars? Every sign in nature, every voice within us, every wise teaching that come to us from without, admonish us that earth is but a colony, and that usefulness in some industry is the condition upon which a settler is received, and the idle are but burthens, whose room would be better than their company.

This is a topic that is spoken of oftener in a whisper in the family circle than in polite society. But a woman does not like to be under pecuniary obligations, and her sensitive nature scorns debt. It is a great pity that our customs and conventionalities do not provide more ways for the remunerative employment of women



who are ambitious to earn an honest living; for be assured, this, too, is a womanly ambition.

There is need and there is room for hard thinking and practical invention on this subject of *work that will pay*, and work that women can do without being ashamed of ridicule, or at the risk of endangering the health.

Besides, the errors prevalent about womanly work, our customs and conventionalities occasion other false ambitions. To be the belle of a ball; to lead the fashion; to put on style in dress; to marry a count, or some other nobody, with a foreign title; to be considered beautiful; to excite the envy of the other girls and cut them out in the admiration of their sweet-hearts; to display extravagant jewelry; to go around collecting money in little ridiculous sums to get a reputation as alms-givers by making others contribute to charities that they do not like to give to themselves; to belong to the lobby of Congress, or the Legislature—all these are morbid, false, unwomanly ambitions, that lead to bitterness and sorrow.

They are beneath the ambition of a true woman, and unworthy of a wise one, who chooses, like Mary, "the better part."

What is worth living for? What is worth dying for? These are the questions that underlie all human endeavor. Make up your mind in answer to these, and you will know what existence is worth.

A woman's life can be exalted and sublime in itself, without being made conspicuous in the world. It is not only her province to be truly great, but to be the inspiring cause of true greatness in others. She is the natural teacher of the world. Hers are the moral forces; it is hers to suggest grand ideas; it is hers to rebuke exalted error, it is hers to sanction or to condemn the elaborate evolutions of man's mental exertion. Her quiet judgment is more decisive than debate; her persistent disapprobation is often more dreadful than battle. Napoleon could overthrow the veteran legions of armed Europe, but he could not endure the refined criticism of Madame de Stael.

Skeptics may cavil and infidels croak, but as long as the mothers in the land find peace, comfort and refuge in the consolations of religion, its teachings and its blessings will sanctify the homes and hearts of the faithful. Armies cannot crush, argument

cannot shake the doctrines that she teaches to the children at her knee. Trial, persecution, martyrdom look into her faithful face and renew their trust in God.

Her fidelity is truer than man's—

“Not she with traitorous lips the master stung ;  
Not she betrayed him with unfaithful tongue.  
She, when apostles fled, could danger brave ;  
Last at the cross, and earliest at the grave.”

Her pure affection only ends with life.

There is nothing in all literature more characteristic of woman or more touching than Ruth's reply to Naomi, “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.”

A true woman does good for its own sake, and wishes as little said about it as possible. She would rather die in obscurity than to have fame throughout the world, coupled with fame's twin sister—calumny. It is within her province to study those things which bless and benefit others.

Through patriotism for her people, Esther periled her life and her position, and every-day life brings into observation the self-denying, self-sacrificing devotion of women struggling with heroic disregard to censure or applause, to promote the welfare of others.

Scarcely a day passes in any life that the judgment of each individual is not called upon to decide in the conflict between inclination and duty. You are to choose and to decide. To decide and to persevere. To persevere and to conquer—or to surrender and die. If the wishes of the heart are kept right, the will to do or to suffer for the sake of the right, must triumph. What you wish to do becomes your ambition just as soon as you are in earnest. You can only be in earnest when you feel that your secret thoughts and wishes are inspired by resignation to the will of God. Would you be truly great, cultivate thoughts and wishes that are ennobling. Would you be truly good, look to the Divine source of all goodness.

“Whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honest; whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure; what-

soever things are lovely ; whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

To build up pleasant places along the paths of life ; to soothe the brow of pain ; to watch the bedside of the sick ; to whisper words of sympathy to troubled hearts ; to inspire with hope and courage the weak and weary victims of despair ; to point with hands angelic to the mercy-seat of God, and, in the unobtrusive spirit of the Great Master, to win back the erring and the wayward to a sense of duty ; to purify the conscience and exalt the purposes of the young—these things are great. Life cannot be dedicated to nobler aspirations, death cannot close upon sublimer career. And yet they are all consistent with womanly ambition.

