



WITH A KNACK FOR RESEARCH - MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE

On the Progress of Education and Industrial Avocations for Women

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Go here for more about [Matilda Joslyn Gage's *On the Progress of Education...* speech](#).

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Matilda Joslyn Gage —
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It follows the full text transcript of Matilda Joslyn Gage's speech *On the Progress of Education and Industrial Avocations for Women*, delivered in 1871.

Twenty years ago,



the first National Woman's Rights Convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts, and was presided over by our present honored Chairman, Mrs. Davis.

The reform had for years been agitated in a small way, and conventions had been held at different points but, until the Worcester Convention, none of these had arisen to the dignity of national.

Great has been the change since that Convention, whose second decade we celebrate, and it has fallen upon me to especially call your attention to the advanced educational facilities enjoyed by the women of 1870, compared with those enjoyed by the women of 1850, and which are the legitimate outgrowth of the woman movement.

The progress of education for women for years was very slow. Although the first grant of land in the United States for a public school-house was made by a woman, it was not the sex to which she belonged that enjoyed its benefits. Even the common-school system of Massachusetts, which is pointed to with so much pride, was originated for boys alone. Thomas Hughes, in his Boston speech the other day, declared that England had derived her educational inspiration from the common school system of Massachusetts. It was the admission of girls to its benefits, an admission primarily made by certain districts to secure their quota of school money. It was the admission of girls to common-school advantages, which made of that system what it now is.

Twenty years ago girls stood upon an equality with boys in common-schools, but not elsewhere had they equal educational advantages. Two colleges at that time, Oberlin and Antioch, professed to admit women upon an equality, but in 1850, no woman in them was allowed to deliver, or even read her own graduating oration. Her presence upon the platform was considered out of place, and if her thoughts were given to the world, the college demanded their utterance through a man's mouth.

In looking over the Holliday library recently sold at auction in this city, I found a book of political caricatures. They were English-coarse, colored wood-prints, but very sharp and laughable. One of them represented a noted politician with a speaking trumpet to his mouth, but he did not give utterance to his own thoughts, for the trumpet passed through the head and out of the mouth of another man. Just so at Oberlin, twenty years ago, were the orations of women graduates trumpeted to the world through a man's mouth. But in 1853, such had already been the advance of public opinion in regard to woman's opportunities, that Oberlin College authorities granted its lady graduates permission to read their orations, though under strict charge not to lay aside the protecting paper. A brave young girl ascended the platform with her oration in her hand, placed it behind her, and, to the astonishment of the faculty and the delight of her hearers, delivered it unaided by man or paper. This was a step in the education of woman whose ultimate results have not yet been reached.

Buckle says the boasted civilizations of antiquity were eminently one-sided, and that they fell because society did not advance in all its parts, but sacrificed some of its constituents in order to secure the progress of others.

Through the past, this has been pre-eminently the case in regard to woman. Education, except in accomplishments, has been for her ignored. She has been called the ornament of life, and her advantages have been of an ornamental character. She has not been treated as a component part of humanity, but as a being having a life outside of her own interests, and not until she herself arose and demanded the enjoyment of all opportunities, was the plan of her education changed. The fact of such demand on the part women is in itself an evidence of advanced civilization.

Robert Spencer says, among all uncultivated people the idea of ornament precedes that of use, and

that this holds good in regard to the mind as well as the body, and that the knowledge which conduces to well-being has been postponed to that which brings applause.

While men have failed to see woman's needs in respect to education, she has seen them herself, and step by step has claimed opportunities, until to-day the highest universities are opening their doors for her admission. Within the past year, Michigan University has admitted women, and at the present time, a period of only about seven months, there are seventeen women students in its medical department alone, besides those entered in its literary and legal departments.

In Iowa, the admission of women to all branches of its University, is rendered compulsory by her State Constitution.

Washington University, of Missouri, has just now opened its doors to women. Baker University, of Kansas; Howard University, of Washington; St. Lawrence University, of New York; and, I believe, also universities in Illinois and Indiana, admit women. So numerous are becoming the colleges and universities which admit women to equal educational advantages with men, or which have recently been founded for women alone, that I shall not attempt to give them more than a passing glance. Most States can boast those of greater or less reputation, and each year—almost each month—adds to their number. One of the latest is the Regent's University, of California; and at our own Cornell University, a woman recently passed a successful examination. No State University can, in common equity, refuse to admit women, as the grant of public lands for their endowment was proportionate to the representation from each State, and women are counted equally with men as the basis of representation.

A good evidence of the change of thought in regard to woman's education is found in school advertisements. One, which recently caught my eye, was of an old school, now in its forty-third year, originally a boy's school. The present year's advertisement reads thus:

"In accordance with the request of several families who wish their daughters to have education similar to their sons, girls will be admitted to all departments of the school."

Besides the schools, colleges and universities opening to women, we find the change of public sentiment has spread to Literary and Scientific Associations. Both in 1869 and '70, women were on the list of officers of the American Social Science Association, and many women have been received as members of Scientific Associations, and by Academies of Arts and Science. The New York State Historical Society has, within the year, admitted its first lady members, while the Historical Society of Chicago has, also within the year, conferred life-membership upon two women, and the State of Michigan has honored itself by appointing a woman State Librarian. Libraries for women have been instituted, and women have also formed themselves into Library Associations, into Art Associations, and into National Educational Associations. They have also been elected Superintendents of Schools, Principals of Normal and Grammar Schools, members of Board of Education, and in Kansas, Wisconsin and Michigan their votes have been made legal on all school questions. They fill, with distinguished honor, various College and University chairs, and not they alone, but their classes, give evidence of woman's capacity both as teacher and learner. Miss Maria Mitchell, of Vassar, one of our distinguished astronomers, has recently graduated a class of seventeen girls, after a three-year course, having carried them as far as she could, and giving them credit for abstruse inquiries and profound mathematical knowledge.

Miss Mitchell herself has been connected with our Coast Survey, and the preparation of our Nautical Almanac. She has the title of Ph. D., and by Professor Agassi's nomination, has become a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and also of the Academy of Arts and Science.

In the widely extended educational system of lectures, women are preeminent. They have been called upon to give commencement orations, even in colleges devoted to the education of boys alone. Fourth of July platforms have welcomed them, and in the Lyceum women are the brightest stars, and each season adds to their number.

In medical education woman is making rapid strides. Twenty years ago not a single Medical College for women was in existence, and but one or two women physicians who, by almost superhuman efforts, had obtained admission to lectures. Now, in the United States alone, there are seven medical colleges wholly for women, some of which were founded by women, and a few others which admit women with

men. The first woman medical college was founded in Philadelphia, in 1853. The Dean of that institution, as well as the two in New York, is a woman. So accustomed has the public become to women in the medical capacity that woman's right to a medical education is less discussed than any other, and some four hundred graduated women physicians are now in regular practice with incomes all the way up to \$15,000 a year.

Not only this, but women have received appointments as city physicians, and as physicians in Colleges, in Alms-houses and in Lunatic Asylums. The prize offered by the "Medical Gazette" last year was carried off by a woman, and medical societies are receiving them as members; and although in some localities this meets with opposition, it requires no prophet's eye to see the final result. The American Institute of Homeopathy, at its annual meeting in 1869, passed a resolution by a large majority declaring that qualified physicians, men or women, were eligible to membership.

Not only are women demanded as physicians in our own country, but from India, where men are not permitted to treat women, the cry comes up to us for their help, and this field widens every day.

The next profession to welcome women was the Theological; and although women ministers have existed from the days of the Apostles to the mother of Wesley, and from her until now, and among the Quakers have always been recognized—a distinguished minister among them now occupying this platform—it is but of late that Theological schools have admitted them; and the first ordained woman minister in our own country only dates back to 1853, when Antoinette Brown was ordained and installed as pastor over a church in the State of New York. Now, a number of women, in various Christian bodies, hold pastorates, one of whom, Rev. Olympia Brown, is seated upon this platform. She performs all the duties of a Christian minister to a church in Bridgeport, Connecticut, over which she is settled. Let me just whisper here that she has a theological student under her instruction, that she performs marriages, and the courts have declared marriages by women ministers to be legal, thus stamping the sanction of the law on this profession, and that she has assisted at ordination, both herself and Mrs. Hanaford taking prominent part, even to the laying on of hands.

In this city at the present time, women delegates are attending a Unitarian convention, and taking active part in its proceedings. Last year twenty-two Unitarian societies sent women delegates to its annual convention.

During the war women officiated as chaplains in the army, and Congress, by especial Act, provided for the payment of at least one such minister.

In August, 1869, the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia took the gospel step of ordaining women as deacons, and five such were duly authorized for the work. Now churches in various parts of the country have accepted their services, and it is the testimony of Henry Ward Beecher that one Deaconess is worth about two ordinary Deacons, which is either saying a good deal for the women or very little for the men.

One of the great revivalists of the day is a woman, a member of the Methodist body, who baptizes her converts, and receives them on probation in the regular ministerial way. More than twenty women are now studying Theology in the United States, and in minor Christian work women fill a wide public space, nor is this advance confined to one or two religious bodies. The Universalists, Unitarians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Christians, Methodists, are not alone. The Episcopal Diocese of Kansas within the year has placed two women on the examining board of the Diocesan Seminary, and the Jews permitting women to take part in the service of the Synagogue.

I must not fail to mention that Young Women's Christian Associations, and Women's Missionary Associations have been formed. That the Methodist Episcopal Church, instituted in 1869, has already over one hundred and thirty auxiliaries. Neither must I forget to mention that the Methodist have stricken the word "obey" out of their marriage service, a grand Christian step, and have also permitted women's votes on the question of lay delegation. The secretary of the Ladies and Pastor's Union of that body, is a lady, now traveling in the interests of the Association in the West.

The Women's Centenary Meeting of the Universalist Church was recently held in Massachusetts, and addressed by several eloquent women pastors, of whom that denomination has nine or ten, and two women, are now on the Board of Directors of the Universalist Association.

At the recent meeting of the Board of Foreign Missions in New York, women addressed crowded houses and awakened deep interest. In Connecticut, a Women's Foreign Missionary Society was recently formed.

In some localities the management of Sunday Schools has almost fallen into women's hands, it being believed that mothers and sisters best know how to interest children. One of the most noted teachers of model lessons for Sunday School Conventions and Institutes is a Chicago lady, who is also editor of one of the departments of the National Sunday School Teacher; and women in other parts of the country are acquiring an extended reputation in the same work.

Did I not wish to confine my remarks to our own country; I should like to refer to the change of religious views as regards women in India, and also in Persia where a new religion has arisen which gives women perfect equality.

Women have also entered the legal profession, and various States are admitting them to the bar. By an act of the Kansas Senate, in 1869, women were admitted to practice law in that State. Mrs. Mansfield, of Iowa, President of the Woman's Suffrage Association of that State, has been admitted to the bar. Missouri recently lost by death her first woman lawyer, Miss Lemme Barkaloo, a native of your neighboring city of Brooklyn. Her death was noticed by members of the St. Louis bar in resolutions, and the customary tributes of respect shown upon the decease of a member. These ceremonies were taken part in by the best legal talent of that city. In Indiana, I believe, a woman has also been admitted to the bar; and in other States they but wait the action of the courts to take their place in the profession. One of these, Mrs. Bradwell, of Illinois, edits a legal paper of acknowledged ability and authority in the profession. One hundred women are now engaged in the study of law in the United States, and among them is a colored lady in the legal department of Howard University. It is but five or six years since the first colored male lawyer was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court, but such is the pressure of woman's demand, and such the advancement our reform is making, that a woman of his race is now close upon his path. Women legal students attending sessions of court have already exerted a refining influence on the speech and habits of masculine lawyers, and are destined to exert a marked effect on the legislation of the world.

The advanced opportunities of work for women may be mentioned by some other person, but a few of those which are somewhat dependent upon certain educational institutions, legitimately fall to my mention. First among these are Schools of Design for women; that of Philadelphia, the oldest, founded by a woman, and that of New York also founded by a woman, but afterward incorporated into the Cooper Institute School of Design. New England also possesses a School of Design for women, founded later than the others. Anatomical instruction also forms part of the course in these schools.

Schools of Telegraphy for women also exist; the Western Union Telegraph Company, employing some forty girls in this city as an especial corps of Telegraphers, to whom instruction is given by competent women teachers. The Cooper Institute Free School of Telegraphy for women was incorporated under the laws of the State of New York and is under the management of an accomplished woman principal.

Industrial Schools, Agricultural and Horticultural Schools, where these latter pursuits are scientifically taught, have also been opened for women, and some women are now largely and successfully engaged in these employments; one lady, having extensive grounds, has erected, at an expense of \$10,000, large horticultural houses for the propagation of grapes.

Industrial schools, no less than the purely literary ones, attest the refined advance made in women's education within the last twenty years.

Were I to include other countries in my report I should trench too long upon the time of the Convention, but I can assure you the good work goes bravely on across the seas, and heathen as well as Christian countries are awakening to a sense of the injustice so long done our sex.

Thus far we have slightly traced the progress of woman's education within the past two decades, but there is no education as valuable as that of practical experience, and women further demand opportunity to use the educational advantages which lie in self-government. It is not our common schools, our colleges, nor our universities which have educated the men of this country. It is the ballot; it is a practical interest in the laws which govern them; it is the thought awakened by the responsibility of self-government.

The end of existence is growth; neither men nor women were created to bend to the accidents of society. The very fact of existence brings obligations with it, and must ultimately ensure the widest opportunities to each individual. If for no other reason than the cultivation of her powers, woman demands to share in the government of the country. She, equally with man, has an inherent right to all opportunity for the full development of her intellect. The education of the schools is but preparatory to the practical education which contact with the world brings. Statesmanship, with its broad humanitarian foundation, is peculiarly her right, and as the advance step in woman's education, fitly crowning the progress of the last twenty years, we demand for her the ballot; "the ballot, the nation's college," widespread in its benefits, and belonging of right to all citizens of the republic.

Twenty years ago woman's recognized sphere of work—the only occupation in which custom deemed it fit she should seek a livelihood—were house work, sewing and teaching. Three years ago the statistics of the New York City Working Woman's Protective Union named forty-three employments other than house-work, in which the women of that city alone were engaged. So wonderful has been the change in public sentiment within the last two decades in regard to men's sphere of work that we find much of the sewing of the world has fallen into men's hands. Not only has the sewing machine given occasion for men to enter this branch of old feminine work, but another masculine employment has grown up in the manufacture of models by which to cut women's clothing; and Worth, as chief dressmaker of the civilized world, stands in women's old work by the side of Blot, whose lessons in that chief housework duty, cookery, are still fresh in our minds.

No less great has been the change in the world's preconceived ideas of women's sphere of work, as shown by employments in which women now freely engage.

Not only are women entering Horticulture and Floriculture, as I have previously shown, but in direct farm work are they taking share, and proving themselves to be the most admirable cultivators of the soil.

Not only in our own country have we many instances of woman's successful management of farms, but from Europe we have like accounts.

The Royal Agricultural Society offered last year a hundred-guinea prize for the best managed farm in the central districts of England. Owing to the fact that farms there are mostly worked by tenants whose rents are equal the first cost of a farm in this country, it requires excellent management to bring about a paying result. Twenty-one farms, however, competed for the above prize, and one, managed by a woman, took it. The judges declared her farm to be an exceedingly good example of a well managed one, and ahead of all the others in point of productiveness, suitability of live stock, and general cultivation with a view to profit.

Nor is the superiorly managed farm a small one, it contains nearly nine hundred acres, and annually winters one thousand sheep and seventy head of cattle.

Quite a proportion of the farmers of England are women, and in our own country is a growing inclination among women for farm work. The Chicago Evening Post reports twenty thousand women as having worked in the field during harvest last year, in the State of Wisconsin alone. The New York Farmers Club pays heed to these signs of the times, and not long ago interested itself to procure land near the city for a woman who wished to enter into the cultivation of small fruits. The question of work today being not so much who does it as how it is done. Not only in agriculture direct, but in occupations bearing upon it, are women to be found. The Cattle Market Reports of New York city are daily made out for certain papers, by a lady of unquestioned ability for the work, whose opinion the Farmers Club quotes, and stock dealers accept as recognized authority in all matters connected with cattle or horses.

A woman of Iowa stands at the head of the Bee interested in the United States. She edits the Bee column in several papers; at Bee conventions her opinion is eagerly sought on all questions which come up; and such is her superior judgment upon Bee culture that it has received recognition from the Government itself. One of her essays upon this subject was adopted by the Department of Agriculture and issued in its report of 1865, she receiving for it the handsome sum of three hundred dollars.

In the manufactures of the country, women are a large and rapidly increasing class. The census of 1860 reported their numbers as 285,000 and no enumeration was made of those employed in manufactures

whose yearly product was less than five hundred dollars.

We also find women gaining their livelihood as stenographers, engravers, printers, telegraphers, photographers, cabinet-makers, black-smiths, engineers, doctors, druggists, dentists, oculists, merchants, clerks, book-keepers, pay-masters, barbers, real estate agents, insurance agents, market-women, hotel-keepers, captains of boats, leaders in orchestras, members of bands, lumber dealers, contractors distillers, managers of theatres, minstrels, and other amusements.

In occupations requiring the close management of money, we find them as bankers, brokers, and cashier, and since laws giving women the control of their own property have been adopted by some States, a vast amount of real estate has come into their possession. A newspaper, devoted to the investigation of facts bearing upon the ownership of land, refers with surprise to the immense number of women who buy and sell land, loan money on mortgages, and in other ways deal in such securities.

As exhibiting woman's business qualities, I may be permitted to say that the Women's Co-operative Association of California declared a dividend of 30 per cent profits upon its capital, within a few months after its formation.

In art-industry, women are fast acquiring an assured place. Seven of the American sculptors in Rome—one third of the whole number—are women. One of these ladies received \$10,000 in gold for her statue of Benton; another was commissioned by congress two years ago for a statue of Lincoln, and the work already awaits the judgment of posterity; while a third is doubly worthy of remembrances, as her genius broke the bonds of race as well as sex.

In painting, Rosa Bonheur stands in the first rank, and at the Paris Exposition of the Industry of all Nations, the painting which drew all eyes, and received the chief prize, was a woman's work.

Literature is fast becoming a recognized means of livelihood, and although twenty years ago it was a common remark that women made their way into it by the compilation of cookery books; now women step at once into the most responsible posts, and as publishers, editors reporters and correspondents, exert a marked influence upon the thought of the day.

The lately issued Index of Harper's Magazine says, "the great number of female writers is worthy of note, and that of writers whose articles are deemed of such special value as to receive exceptional prices, there are more women than men."

In England, a woman holds to-day the foremost place in literature; in France it is a woman's writings which are the most eagerly sought, and which are exerting the most marked influence on the social wrongs of the age. The book which in our own country did so much to bring about a social and moral revolution, and which has been read on every continent of the globe, was also from a woman's pen.

Government has recognized woman's worth as a worker by placing her in various departments at Washington, and her service are now rendered in the general Post Office Department, the Treasury Department, and the Department of the Interior, and we have the testimony of the highest officials as to her capability and honest in these employments.

As teachers of a Nautical School, two women of New York, during the war, prepared over two thousand mates and captains for the rigid Government examination they were then obliged to undergo.

Women are also engaged in work belonging especially to a political sphere. Not only in Wyoming, where a woman justice has tried over forty cases, in all of which her judgment stands, but in States where she is a non-voter she has been appointed to paying positions, and in Maine has also officiated as Justice of the Peace. In Montana she acts as Sheriff, in Iowa as Constable, in Kansas and Missouri as Engrossing Clerk, and Enrolling Clerk in the Legislature of those States; and in others as Notary Public, Town Clerks, Revenue Officers, Inspector and Commissioner of Schools. Post Offices innumerable are also under her charge; the scantily populated State of Texas even, boasting of forty-five, while some of the largest and most important offices in the Union are indebted to women for many improvements in their management.

More than this, a woman's branch of a National Police Agency has been in existence of fifteen years, which has not only manifested its efficacy, in the discovery of stolen property, but once, at least, within

the last few years, in a way which had its bearing upon our existence as a nation.

At the breaking out of the war, this agency was transferred to Washington, and the woman at its head was placed in charge of the women's branch of the Secret War Service.

Before Lincoln took his seat as President, whispers were rife throughout the country of a plan to assassinate him while on his way to Washington. Such a plan did exist, and its spirits were some of the most daring of the rebellion. Baltimore, from the unusual facilities a transit through that city gave, was the place chosen for its execution; but quietly and silently a woman detective laid her counteracting plan, managing all its details so successfully, that Lincoln passed unrecognized through the city, and reached Washington in safety.

The world is woman's, and in it, she, too, must do what her hands find to be done.