IS WOMAN’S PLACE IN THE HOME?

As I am talking to you for several weeks to come on women of today, let us state certain facts and then some friends of mine, Mrs. Genevieve Forbes Herrick of Chicago, and Miss Martha Strayer, newspaper woman of Washington, D.C., are waiting to ask me what they consider pertinent questions on these facts.

First, many people think this has already become a woman’s world. I am quite willing to acknowledge that in certain ways women are rapidly wiping out the age-old superiority of the male, but I can not say that I think we have yet reached the Amazon stage! It is still easier for men to do so certain things than it is for women.

This advance in women’s position, of course, varies in different parts of the world, but it is clearly manifest everywhere. What we are primarily interested in is the way it is changing in our own country.

Man in his retreat is still using as his last ditch, the old slogan of “woman’s place is in the home”, witness certain European countries, and a speaker before an educational meeting of the other day who made this same proposal for the United States of America.

QUESTION

Do you think, Mrs. Roosevelt, that women’s place is in the home?

ANSWER

That is an interesting question, Mrs. Herrick.

Not long ago I saw a number of editorials saying that it was all very well for women to think that the work which they do outside of their homes is useful or important, but it is really negligible in comparison to the job of rearing a family. All women, however, are not born housekeepers, nurses, teachers, but no one will deny that the normal woman feels that her home must come first and that if she falls in love and can marry and have children, this is the life which probably will bring her the greatest lasting happiness.

QUESTION

But how about the woman who does not fall in love and has to earn her own living?

ANSWER

Well, Miss Strayer, it seems to me that this is a most important question, for I am constantly surprised by the number of women who not only have to earn their own livings, but have to support dependents. Sometimes I think there are more mothers and younger brothers and sisters supported by their women relatives than by their men relatives. The boy of the family is apt to marry and have a family of his own. The girl feels the weight of her responsibility so much at home that even though she may fall in love, her responsibilities hold her and they even satisfy the inborn craving for a home and the ever present maternal instinct in every woman. The only sad part of it is that she must sometime find herself left alone. I see you smiling, Miss Strayer, Mrs. Herrick, and I realize, of course, that this may happen to married women, so perhaps the woman who has had a career is not in such a desperate situation, for she may have kept a greater number of interests outside of the home and these may serve as a help when the older members of her family die and the younger members of her family are educated and out in the world for themselves.
QUESTION
But, Mrs. Roosevelt does not that seem to suggest that it would well be for the married woman to keep up some outside interests?

ANSWER
Personally, Mrs. Herrick, I believe that it is. In the pioneer days the home was a factory, nowadays many of the old home occupations have moved out and become commercial occupations. Even the woman who does all her own housework and takes care of her own children, while she may be tied down during the early years, has a certain amount of time to devote to keeping her mind alert. As the children grow older, she has time to do some outside things. There always was an obligation upon women to do church work and charitable work. The modern woman is beginning to realize that civic work and an interest in her government is almost more important than charitable work, because it strikes more fundamentally at the root of things which all charity would alleviate, but not exterminate, and now she has the vote, which places direct responsibility on her. Her husband may be busy, her children are going to leave home, and the time may come when of necessity she may desire to augment the family income. If that is a consideration, all the training she can muster in the past will be of value. She will be glad she has not completely let her ability in her personal, independent field go to seed.

QUESTION
Do you think, Mrs. Roosevelt, that women can be as good executives as men?

ANSWER
Yes, Miss Strayer. There is no question in my mind that such women who have ventured from the fireside have become increasingly important factors from the economic standpoint. They are achieving great success as producers and sellers of merchandise and whether they are actively engaged in production or not, their taste and desires are the major consideration in many lines of business production. Women are at the head of large department stores, they are at the head of advertising agencies, they are editors of magazines. There is really no field of business and of the professions where you can not find a woman who has climbed to the top. This must mean that they are efficient executives. One interesting thing is that the “career” woman is not always the mannish type of woman as you might suppose, but frequently what is known as the extremely feminine type.

QUESTION
Mrs. Roosevelt, it is always said that women are not eminently successful in the creative arts. What do you think?

ANSWER
That has been true, Mrs. Herrick, but as a matter of fact, of late years women have been the greatest factor as patrons of the arts and there are a few of them who have shown creative ability. In the fields of literature and the drama, I should say there are many women today who stand on a par with the men. In other fields, however, they have not yet made such strides. Here and there you find the names of great women painters or sculptors or musicians, but this slower development may be because of the restrictions cast around the lives of women in the past, which have curtailed their freedom. Freedom is necessary for the development of the creative spirit which can not be bound by the conventions. We can not deny that for many years women have been hedged in by conventions to a far greater extent than have men. Yes, Miss Strayer?

QUESTION
What would you say about women in the field of religion and education?

ANSWER
I should say that in the field of religion, we do not claim many great women preachers. Women are supposed to be the talkers of the world, and yet the orators, both lay and ecclesiastic, seem to be primarily men. When it comes to ministering to the needs of humanity, “to taking care of the lost sheep”, the women are predominately in the field of social service, and many stand preeminent.

Both men and women have been great educators. The business of education appeals to the maternal and the paternal instincts, and the honors in this field are about equally divided. In the actual teaching profession, I think men and women are almost equally successful.
QUESTION
Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, one last question, what do you think about women in the field of politics and public affairs?

ANSWER
Time was when only such women as could be counted on to do as they were told were allowed to hold party offices, but that day is over and done with. If a woman does as good work in politics as in other fields and chooses to be independent today, she is increasingly recognized and given a free hand to work out her own salvation just as the men do. She may have a few extra hurdles to jump, but nothing insurmountable will be put in her way. We are nearing a point, not when the world will be a woman’s world, but when there shall be real equality between men and women.

I should say that woman’s place is in the home, but today her home is no longer encompassed by four walls nor her activities limited. This will be a great benefit to the human race, I believe. Biologically woman is the mother of the race. Through her the stream of life goes on.

A woman must have her own life just as a man has always had, she must live her own life. She can not live her husband’s nor her children’s lives any more than they can or should live hers. She will undoubtedly become more efficient in developing this art of living, and this world, where men and women shall have equal opportunities and equal responsibilities, even though they may be different each from the other, may prove to be a more agreeable world for all of us to live in than the old one we are leaving behind.