1932

Abigail Adams Makes a Suggestion & Brooks Adams Asks a Question

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ABIGAIL AND BROOKS ADAMS

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~~BY~~ By Earl C. Davis

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The late Albert E. Pillsbury, former Attorney General of Massachusetts, bequeathed certain funds to Harvard University and other institutions of learning with the stipulation that the income of said funds be used to combat the feminist movement. Not only Harvard University, but Columbia as well refused to accept the funds under the conditions stated. According to the terms of the will a portion of these funds, rejected by the Universities, have now passed to the Margaret Pillsbury Hospital of Concord, N. H. to be used for its maintainance and work. One gets a chuckle of amusement in recalling the fact that the Margaret Pillsbury Hospital is largely and primarily the product of the interests and labor of women, and in a degree an expression of that feminist movement that Albert Pillsbury sought to combat. The incident illustrates the way in which both our personal and social aspirations become involved with complicat~~ion~~ed forces and prejudices that confuse us and often defeat the very ends we seek to realize.

A few years ago ~~the Survey~~ a well-known Magazine published an article in which was set forth the thesis, based on a rather searching investigation, that there

exists along the Atlantic seaboard an area within which the forces of social disintegration are going on with such rapidity as to threaten the social stability of that region and to imperil the whole fabric of our society. It was pointed out that this area, beginning at Boston, running along the congested industrial and commercial centers through New York, Philadelphia and on to Washington was not a self-sustaining society but depended for its existence upon its ability to draw into its swirling life the wealth of men and material produced under more wholesome and normal conditions. To such an extent had this congestion gone on, and so excessive had been the development of anti-social forces within the area that a process of social disintegration of major proportions was under way. To put it in other words this area which has been, not only the product, but, in many ways, the very essence of the industrial development of the past century has become essentially a parasitic society. Not alone its food and its means of physical existence have been drawn from the more remote sections, but also its constructive man power, its industrial, and its political and commercial leadership have been recruited from the outside. The story of the small town lad and the boy from the farm making good in the great city, is but an illustration of this constant drain upon the resources of society to

maintain the semblance of stability in an area where the process of disintegration had already become a fact.

That this process, thus described, several years ago, as operating within a limited area, has been going on in every congested region seems for the moment at least to be true. How far-reaching the change, through which we are now passing, may be, one hesitates to guess. Some of our tired souls will tell us that not only are our industrial and commercial machines at a practical standstill; but our political machinery has broken down completely. They point to our bankrupt cities and towns; our municipal corruption; our staggering burdens of taxation; our lack of intelligent and courageous political and social leadership; and say, " Such are the fruits of democracy and our industrial development". Not only are they broken and disintegrating, but they have carried down with them the machinery for the administration of justice; and the forces of religion and culture. We are not in a depression; we have come to the end of an era".

Without debating the accuracy of such statements, they certainly demand of us a candid and, if possible, an unprejudiced consideration. About a year ago in discussing this general situation with one of the wisest men I have known, we came upon the question

as to what, from the point of view of religion, ought and should be done in such a period. Being a man of great learning, insight and understanding, he brushed aside all the secondary considerations, and, like one preparing for a journey of exploration in undiscovered lands, selected what he regarded as fundamental. " From the point of view of religion", said he, " there are two points where a definite stand must be taken; and then bide the time when the historical processes work out their excesses and essential values re-assert themselves."

" First. It is important to take a positive stand on the nature and character of man,- of human nature,- a reassertion of its intellectual and moral quality, its responsibility for perceiving and maintaining standards of values, and directing the social processes.

" Second. A similar stand must be taken on the quality and character of the home and family relations. Those who see the purposive significance beneath the institutions of domestic relations, must reaffirm the essential value of high standards and by the sheer power of their insight and fidelity continue to maintain unimpaired the highest standards of family and home life." That is a startling declaration. To brush aside as of secondary importance all the social institutions that we have created and the problems that we face; and to affirm that our two greatest needs are people

of ability plus a sense of responsibility and an unquestioned integrity of family conditions where such qualities are nurtured; emphasize by implication the searching character of the period, and compel us to ask whether or not the things that we are concerned with involve qualities that promise survival in the struggle for existence.

The second declaration about the integrity of the home and its bearing on the general conditions of the social order leads one to the inevitable consideration of woman's place in society, thence straight to the feminist movement, as such.

Some light on the contrasting views and emotions aroused when we approach this yet unsettled matter may be found inside one of America's most famous families. That Abigail Adams in 1776 should take one view in writing to her husband John Adams and that in 1919 an illustrious scion of the same family, Brooks Adams, should state the opposing view is not without its lessons and its amusement.

Before comparing the two statements let the following generalization be made. Namely, that in the background of the political movement which resulted in the establishment of the United States there are social and philosophical implications that have by no means worked themselves out into the realities of organization and conduct. We

have still much more to learn from that period than we have yet imagined. More and more we shall study to our great advantage and enlightenment the character, methods and purposes of that stalwart old revolutionist John Adams, and the courageous persistent son, John Quincy Adams. As a nation we have not yet begun to appreciate the significance of the spirit of '76, the forces and thoughts that were emerging in the stream of history at that time. Not only were new ideas concerning government stirring in the minds of 1776, but also new ideas concerning religion and morals as well. Charles and Mary Beard in " The Rise of American Cicilization" call attention to this fact. " When the crisis of the American Revolution came, Jefferson, Paine, John Adams, Washington, Franklin, Madison, and many lesser lights were to be reckoned among either the Liberals or the Deists. It was not Cotton Mather's God to whom the author of the declaration of independence appealed, it was to nature's God. From whatever source derived, the effect of both Unitarianism and Deism Deism was to hasten the retirement of historic theology from its empire over the intellect of American leaders, and to clear the atmosphere for secular interests."

Beyond both the political and the religious-philosophical ideas there were emerging

others, destined to have a profound effect upon American history. Experience in the new world was bringing its first great harvest.

Let the significance of Abigail Adams' declaration of 1776 appear more clearly by seeing the whole picture. Abagail Smith was born in 1744, daughter of Parsom Smith of Weymouth and Elizabeth Quincy. That gave her an almost sacrosacnt family tradition. She was of the established order. Not many could call Colonel John Quincy, "Grandfather", or find themselves at home in such influential households. But by the time Abigail was eighteen she had a "spark" in the person of one John Adams, son of a respectable but ordinary farmer and shoemaker. To be sure John had graduated from Harvard College, but he had committed the great social error of choosing the law for his profession instead of the more influential and socially acceptable profession of the ministry. There was objection on social grounds to the marriage. But the spirit of '76 was running in Abigail Smith's veins, and she had something to say about whom she was going to marry and why. Thus it happened that on October 25th, 1764, all the Nortons, and Quinceys and the Smiths assembled to see Mary Smith married to John Adams, son of a farmer, and himself a lawyer. Abigail's father preached the marriage sermon on the text, " For John came neither eating bread nor drinking

wine, yet ye say he hath a devil."

Then came her growing wisdom and expanding responsibilities of married life. Four children were born; part of the time they lived in Boston where John Adams earned reputation as a lawyer and as one of the most reliable, keen-minded, courageous young men among those in the colony who were becoming identified with the revolutionary spirit.

Abigail not only learned to care for her children, to care for the household, to spin and to weave; to share with her husband in the growing revolt; to meet the obligations of her social life; but she had also learned to manage the farm; to direct the men who worked it and supervise the finances of the farm and the house, so that, as public affairs demanded the attention of the farmer-lawyer, and took him away for weeks at a time, Abigail became the general-manager. Perhaps her spirit towards all these obligations, is well illustrated by her charge to him to " take as good care of himself as is consistant with his public obligations." It may be that right here in this charge of Abigail Adams to John to take as good care of himself as is consistant with his public obligations that we discover the secret of that heroic struggle which both John Adams and John Quincey Adams waged against the predatory instincts of State Street and the

equally predatory hordes that were to swing into governmental power with Andrew Jackson. There is a vast difference between a rugged and responsible individualism, and a ruggedly acquisitive individualism. The one says, " Take good care of yourself". The other says, " Take as good care of yourself as is consistent with your public obligations."

But a time of crisis was at hand. The incident at Lexington and Concord; the struggle at Bunker Hill and the death of Warren; the trenches at Dorchester Heights, manned by raw troops; the evacuation of Boston by the British who had left for parts unknown had become events of history. Abigail was running the farm, attending to business, keeping John informed concerning all things political and military going on at home, and anxiously waiting the news as she pondered on the great revolt they were contemplating. John Adams was in Philadelphia. The play of persons and forces out of which was to come the Declaration of Independence was in full swing amid the sweltering heat and discomforts of that city. " Great things" John had written, " here were on the tapis."

From this same household out of which was emergimg heresy in politics and religion, heresies in which, apparently, Abigail shared with John to the full limit both in understanding and support,

there was sent this letter in 1776 from Abigail to John. It entitles Abigail Adams to the honor of being the first or among the first of the feminists in this country.

She says,- " I long to hear that you have declared for independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire that you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyyants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to forment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have not voice and representation.

" That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute; but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend. (John always addressed Abigail in letters as " My dearest Friend) Why, then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity, with impunity? Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your sex; regard us then as beings placed by providence under your

protection, and in imitation of the " Supreme Being" make use of that power only for our happiness."

That is a remarkable letter. More than a century and a half have passed since it was written. Its main suggestions are sound and grow as naturally out of the spirit of '76 as did the Declaration of Independence itself. In that letter also speaks as fine a quality of womanhood as ever cared for a child or presided over a household.

The reply of John Adams is equally interesting, partly because of its disclosure of the intimate and humorous frankness that characterized their letters; and partly because it suggestd the difficulties that her suggestion would meet with in its journey through the years ahead.

" I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians, and negroes grew insolent to their masters; but your letter is the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment, but you are so saucy, I won't blot

it out. Depend upon it we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power to its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and softly, and, in practise, you know we are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather than give this up, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight; I am sure every good politician would plot as long as he could against despotism, empire, monarchy, aristocracy, and oclocracy. A fine story indeed; I begin to think the ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up tories, land jobbers, trimmers, bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Honoverians, Hessians, Irish Roman Catholics, Scotch Renegadoes, they have at last stimulated the ladies to demand new privileges and threaten to rebel."

Such a delicious letter, and yet how characteristic of John Adams' insight. So much then for Abigail Adams' suggestion. Its growth and development into one of the major phases of modern life need not detain us. Those who have shared in its progress equally with those who have feared its dangers are now concerned in its results. We jump the years to 1919, when Brooks Adams, descendant of Abigail comes forward with his criticism and judgment of what he calls the feminist movement of

our times. It is of interest not alone because it comes from a descendant of Abigail Adams but also because it emerges from one of the most significant strains in American history, a strain of thought and a standard of disinterestedness to which we must return from our prodigal journey of ruggedly acquisitive individualism.

In that remarkable book, The Degredation of Democratic Dogma, in which Henry Adams sets forth a philosophy of History, Brooks Adams writes an introduction under the heading of " The Heritage of Henry Adams". In this Introduction, Brooks Adams, in speaking of Henry Adams' attitude towards the Reformation, says,- " He found the " Reformation antagonistic, chiefly, I think, because of the Puritan attack on women; for it was during the Reformation that the Virgin was dethroned, and according to his theory, I take it, that the degredation of [illegible] of woman began.....Now as a lawyer and a historian, I insist that society as an organism has little or no interest in woman's reason. But its very existence is bound up in her instincts. Intellectually, woman's reason has been a matter of indifference to men. As an intellectual competitor she has never been formidable; but maternity is a monopoly. It is the passionate instinct which is the cause and the effect of maternity, and which enables women to serve their great purpose as the

cement of society."

Superficially it seems astounding that Brooks Adams a descendant of Abigail, the feminist, should utter such a statement. Searching as the statement is I hasten to add another much more vigorous and positive, less a philosophic generalization, and more closely related to actuality. In the year 1919, reviewing the affairs of the world from the point of view of a philosophy of history, and with an almost uncanny insight into the political and social outlook of the western world at that time he presents the serious situation involved as the peace settlement seems to have been taken out of the hands of political authorities, and to have passed into the hands of money interests that lurked in the background. Then he goes on to say, " And yet, serious as this situation may appear to be in the light of the present unstable social equilibrium, it is naught beside the terrors which threatens our society, as at present organized, by the unsexing of women. Since the great industrial capitalistic movement began throughout the modern world toward ~~1870~~ 1830, the modern feminist has sought to put the woman upon a basis of legal equality at which she would be enabled, as it was thought, to become the economic competitor of man. At length, after nearly a century, and as one of the effects of the recent

war, she seems to have succeeded in her ambition. So far as is possible the great sexual instinct has been weakened or suppressed. So far as is possible it is now ignored systematically in our education. Woman is ashamed of her sex and imitates the man. And the results are manifest enough to alarm the most optimistic and confiding. The effect has been to turn enormous numbers of women into the lower ranks of the lower paid classes of labor, but, far worse, in substance, to destroy the influence of women in modern civilization, save in so far as her enfranchisement tends to degrade the democratic level of intelligence. The woman, as the cement of society, the head of the family, and the centre of cohesion, has, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. She has become a wondering isolated unit, rather a dispersive than a collective force."

" Already the working of the poison is apparent in our system of law, and it is appalling. The family principle has decayed until, as a legal conception, it has ceased to exist. The father has no authority, the wife is absolutely independent and so are the children, save so far as the state exerts a modified control, as in the matter of education. (The graduated tax seeks to equalize the earning power of the individual, and the inheritance tax confiscates accumulations to the state). The advanced

feminist claims for the woman the right to develop herself according to her own will. She may decline to bear children, or, if she consents, she is to bear them to whom she may choose. If so, the state must regulate such matters, and the women must be required to serve the state by bearing children as man serves the state in the army. The state must assume the education and cost of children, when so born, and must subsequently employ them at an average wage, all thus being put on an equality. Such is the manifest direction in which the efforts of our advanced feminists tend."

Thus Brooks Adams viewed the situation in 1919. We blink our eyes as we read, and wonder just what can be the matter with him, and just what he is trying to say, and just what he does say has to do with the actual facts and forces at play in the year 1932. Again we ask how could a descendant of Abigail Adams get so far off the track, and be so blind to the progress and improvement in women and in the status of women since 1776?

Of course we can paint a picture quite different in tone and color,- the picture of the educated woman; the picture of the intelligent wife and mother, broad-minded, interested in all cultural and public affairs; charming companions of their husbands; fine and understanding friends of their healthy and robust children; well versed in the

affairs of state; capable, in an emergency, of taking over the economic burdens of the family; in short, all-round women of ability and integrity,- Just the sort of a woman that Abigail Adams was, and living under conditions more or less like the conditions that she suggested as desireable in her letter to John Adams in 1776. That also is part of the picture. There has been and there still is a majestic power and quality to the woman movement, Brooks Adams to the contrary notwithstanding.

We might go on to enlarge upon these facts by pointing out the achievments of women in the arts and sciences as well as in the industrial world, yet there remains too much of Brooks Adams' statement of 1919 that fits into the picture of our social disturbances of 1932 to permit us to pass it by with a shrug of the shoulder as the by-product of a burned soul. The trend and tone of much of the popular literature of the past fifteen years; the returns of the divorce courts; the preoccupation of many with new codes of morals; experiments in domestic relations; and a multitude of incidents registered not only in the tabloids but in the more conventional journals of opinion, are just such facts and tendencies as Brooks Adams could point to and say, " I told you so." The overshadowing of the home by the state in the Russian experiment; the same tendency in this country, especially as it is

revealed in matters of health and education; and in the weak spots disclosed under the pressure of the depression, point in the same direction. Or one might point to the many excessive fads and foibles of social life; the restless and hectic search for thrills and pleasure. The attitude here referred to is well expressed by Kathrine Brush in one of the popular journals of the day,- Writing under the title " I refuse to take life seriously", she says, " People who take life seriously take marriage seriously. In point of fact I'm inclined to believe that marriages taken lightly are more liable to last; chains worn loose are not so irksome. To take marriage seriously is to expect too much of it. We do better to realize that the institution is man-made, not divine, that husbands and wives are human beings, not angels."

" The people who take life seriously believe that it is important to check over their bank statement, to retire early and rise early, to remember, in telling an anecdote, whether it happened on Tuesday or on Wednesday. To my mind these things and other things like them are pifflingly uninportant, even silly. Who cares whether it happened Tuesday or Wednesday? Why should anybody check over bank statements? The Bank is always right and I can prove it. I may

sound flippant, but I am quite in earnest. As for early rising and early retiring, the first is not so bad if it follows the second, but the second is impossible. Most of the really exciting people I have ever known I have known after ten o'clock in the evening. And most of the really dramatic things I have seen, I've seen by artifical light. The mask of humanity slips a little at night, as at no other time. In the daytime we are all bisque.

" To live the moment joyously----- surely this is wisdom. To feel that the world is grand and glamorous, and lovely, and existence in it a thrill to be thankful for."

That is an interesting point of view. " Exciting people"; " dramatic things"; "artifical light";"to live the moment joyously"; " a thrill to be thankful for". It has its appeal; many try it; few get very far with it. Perchance it is the excess of this appraach to life that has produced the great multitude of whom Walter Lippman speaks as " The women who have emancipated themselves from the tyranny of fathers, husbands, and homes, and with the intermittent but expensive help of a psychoanalyst, are now enduring liberty as interior decorators."

Not even Brooks Adams could write a more pungent sentence. The pity is that it fits into the picture. But just as the bank holds the balance, and, as Kathrine Brush says, is always

right, so there is a balance in the nature of things to which we are held accountable even though the accounting may be a tragedy. We do even now catch the presence of another tone not only in written opinion, but in personal conversation. I pick up a man on the road. He tells me his story. Hunting for a job. Shoe cutter by trade. Used to make $ 38 to $ 40. per week. Wages now $ 18.00 per week, if he only could get a job. Possibility that his young wife, mother of four children, oldest five years, youngest ten months, may get a job in the factory where he is refused; hopes that because they want her, they will take him. Then both together may earn almost as much as he earned before. They will hire some elderly person to take care of the children. Taking it by and large how near right would Brooks Adams be in asserting that the result of woman in industry has been but to make it impossible for the husband to earn enough to maintain a home while she rears the children? Will the children die off, or will the Town or State step in to provide for them? I read a recent article anonymous record of a woman who voluntarily chose a professional career; has been successful; but at fifty the zest of life has gone; she finds herself increasingly isolated from the main currents, as if, so to speak, she were slowly moving out onto

a promontory of existence alone,- conscious that the life strain that for aeons has been finding its way into her persons ends. It is tragic but the balance is exhausted. The memory of a million thrills does not atone. Another in " Ten Years After The Divorce", Anonymous" strikes another strain, and brings us back from a world of disillusion and discontent, wise with a wisdom that perchance only a suffering experience can attain. " But we could go on together trying to understand each other, sometimes perhaps succeeding. Always we should wait for our boy's train together, and together we should do what we could to make the life for which we are mutually responsible a happy one. Together we should give him the comfort he now lacks of happy parents, a comfort which is the tragic , quietly desperate need of every child.

" If I had to do it over again, I would not divorce my husband, but this is a fact I should not confess to a single living soul."

These anonymous confessions that are beginning to appear, linked to a similar strain that finds a place in popular literature are not miraculous accidents. It was inevitable that they should appear, as inevitable as the return of the wild animal to the salt licks. Surely Brooks Adams is right in his emphasis upon the instinctive monopolistic character and quality of maternity.

For individual reasons or because of limitations

and unavoidable obligations some woman may miss the opportunity of domestic relations and responsibilities. But ~~the~~ THE instinct of the race, of all living things, is back of the sentence,- " Together we should give him the comfort he now lacks of happy parents, a comfort which is the tragic, quietly desperate need of every child". Here and there individuals may try to thwart it; may seek thrills; and careers; diversions and dramatic episodes; even cults may be established, and movements may be started that we may escape from our bondage of child bearing and domestic relations, but the naked truth is that we are packed with the pulse of an unborn race. The freedom that Abigail Adams sought was not a freedom from a functional instinct and its obligations, but freedom for its fullfillment and escape from its perversions. The tide has turned; the confessions of anonymous writers will increase. As time goes on the courage to publicly acknowledge a mistake and seek to rectify it will be added unto the initial fact of recognizing it in secret. The Hounds of Heaven are on the trail.

What the results? Will woman again be chained to the sink and the wash-tub? Will she again become the slave of man's passionate whims? Will her excursion into the realms of science, the fine arts, and her achievements in education be forgotten? That does not seem to be the alternative. The fruits of one hundred and fifty years in the education and

emancipation of woman have some contribution to make. While many difficult and baffling problems loom, it seems somewhat safe to make one or two generalizations.

The first one would be that, however difficult it may be to attain, the marriage relations will continue to be free, increasingly, of the domination of either over the other. The difficulties of adjustment in the marriage relations are great, and challenge the quality of the best of persons. But as time goes on and we become more naturally the children of our modern world, we shall learn that differences and difficulties are not the occasion for fight and divorce, but the occasion for understanding and adjustment. Such understanding and adjustment will be the easier because of the contribution which is coming to the problem by the greater freedom, the broader experience and better general education of woman. There exists the possibility of a greater companionship. Added to this is the probability that there is developing a growing appreciation on the part of both men and women, that all industrial activities, all arts and sciences, all social developments derive their final significance from the contribution that they may make to the coming generation. The movement is in the direction of marriage as cooperative venture. Perhaps the danger that threatens here is the extent to which the state may seek to intervene and rob the venture of its full responsibilities and thus

curtail the possible richness of the relationship. At the moment the impinging of the state upon the individual and the family seem to threaten.

In the second place it seems probable that just as women live a freer life, and have a broader understanding of affairs, and seem to be unearthing the deeper implications of their functional monopoly, so they will come to regard their privilege as mothers in a much broader and far-reaching light. All of Abigail Adams' activities and interests were in her life as Wife and mother. " Milk-maid, housewife, successful farmer, weaver, teacher, wife, mother; and withal when conditions demanded, she had taken her place beside the Ambassador to Great Britain, and as First Lady of the Land"; she had entered into the revolution and had made the political and social movements of the times her own because they were all a part of her great and pervasive life-work as wife and mother; they were expressions not only of herself, but of the lives and the nation that she and John Adams were bringing to fruition. It seems clear that in increasing numbers women will see their relationships to society, not so much as opportunities for exploitation, as chance for a career or an experience, but as expressions of their monopolistic function. It will be primarily as mothers that they will reach out into the community and cast the

weight of the influence in its development. Increasingly, also, I believe, those women who for various reasons do not become actual mothers will bend their influence into activities and interests that will enable them to satisfy vicariously the maternal instinct, and make perhaps one of the greatest contributions of all.

In other words all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot divert the human race from its functional march. Increasing intelligence and deeper experience serves to broaden the foundations, and enrich the relationships that exist between men and women as bearers and rearers of children together.

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Abigail Adams Makes a Suggestion & Brooks Adams Asks a Question

Earl Clement Davis

1932[1]

The late Albert E. Pillsbury, former Attorney General of Massachusetts, bequeathed certain funds to Harvard University and other institutions of learning with the stipulation that the income of said funds be used to combat the feminist movement. Not only Harvard University, but Columbia as well refused to accept the funds under the conditions stated. According to the terms of the will a portion of these funds, rejected by the Universities, have now passed to the Margaret Pillsbury Hospital of Concord, N.H. to be used for its maintenance and work. One gets a chuckle of amusement in recalling the fact that the Margaret Pillsbury Hospital is largely and primarily the product of the interests and labor of women, and in a degree an expression of that feminist movement that Albert Pillsbury sought to combat. The incident illustrates the way in which both our personal and social aspirations become involved with complicated forces and prejudices that confuse us and often defeat the very ends we seek to realize.

A few years ago a well-known Magazine published an article in which was set forth the thesis, based on a rather searching investigation, that there exists along the Atlantic seaboard an area within which the forces of social disintegration are going on with such rapidity as to threaten the social stability of that region and to imperil the whole fabric of our society. It was pointed out that this area, beginning in Boston, running along the congested industrial and commercial centers through New York, Philadelphia and on to Washington was not a self-sustaining society but depended for its existence upon its ability to draw into its swirling life the wealth of men and material produced under more wholesome and normal conditions. To such an extent had this congestion gone on, and so excessive had been the development of anti-social forces within the area that a process of social disintegration of

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[1] I have found at least three versions of this manuscript. Internal evidence suggests that the transcript that follows is from the final version.

major proportions was under way. To put it in other words this area which has been, not only the product, but, in many ways, the very essence of the industrial development of the past century has become essentially a parasitic society. Not alone its food and its means of physical existence have been drawn from the more remote sections, but also its constructive man power, its industrial, and its political and commercial leadership have been recruited from the outside. The story of the small town lad and the boy from the farm making good in the great city, is but an illustration of this constant drain upon the resources of society to maintain the semblance of stability in an area where the process of disintegration had already become a fact.

That this process, thus described, several years ago, as operating within a limited area, has been going on in every congested region seems for the moment at least to be true. How far-reaching the change, through which we are now passing, may be, one hesitates to guess. Some of our tired souls will tell us that not only are our industrial and commercial machines at a practical standstill; but our political machinery has broken down completely. They point to our bankrupt cities and towns; our municipal corruption; our staggering burdens of taxation; our lack of intelligent and courageous political and social leadership; and say, “Such are the fruits of democracy and our industrial development. Not only are they broken and disintegrating, but they have carried down with them the machinery for the administration of justice; and the forces of religion and culture. We are not in a depression; we have come to the end of an era.”

Without debating the accuracy of such statements, they certainly demand of us a candid and, if possible, an unprejudiced consideration. About a year ago in discussing this general situation with one of the wisest men I have known, we came upon the question as to what, from the point of view of religion, ought and should be done in such a period. Being a man of great learning, insight and understanding, he brushed aside all the secondary considerations, and, like one preparing for a journey of exploration in undiscovered lands, selected what he regarded as fundamental. “From the point of view of religion,” said he, “there are two points where a definite stand must be taken; and then bide the time when the

historical processes work out their excesses and essential values re-assert themselves."

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> Second. A similar stand must be taken on the quality and character of the home and family relations. Those who see the purposive significance beneath the institutions of domestic relations, must reaffirm the essential value of high standards and by the sheer power of their insight and fidelity continue to maintain unimpaired the highest standards of family and home life.

That is a startling declaration. To brush aside as of secondary importance all the social institutions that we have created and the problems that we face; and to affirm that our two greatest needs are people of ability plus a sense of responsibility and an unquestioned integrity of family conditions where such qualities are nurtured; emphasize by implication the searching character of the period, and compel us to ask whether or not the things that we are concerned with involve qualities that promise survival in the struggle for existence.

The second declaration about the integrity of the home and its bearing on the general conditions of the social order leads one to the inevitable consideration of woman's place in society, thence straight to the feminist movement, as such.

Some light on the contrasting views and emotions aroused when we approach this yet unsettled matter may be found inside one of America's most famous families. That Abigail Adams in 1776 should take one view in writing to her husband John Adams and that in 1919 an illustrious scion of the same family, Brooks Adams, should state the opposing view is not without its lessons and its amusement.

Before comparing the two statements let the following generalization be made. Namely, that in the background of the political movement which resulted in the establishment of the United States there are social and philosophical implications that have by no means worked themselves out

into the realities of organization and conduct. We have still much more to learn from that period than we have yet imagined. More and more we shall study to our great advantage and enlightenment the character, methods and purposes of that stalwart old revolutionist John Adams, and the courageous persistent son, John Quincy Adams. As a nation we have not yet begun to appreciate the significance of the spirit of '76, the forces and thoughts that were emerging in the stream of history at that time. Not only were new ideas concerning government stirring in the minds of 1776, but also new ideas concerning religion and morals as well. Charles and Mary Beard in "The Rise of American Civilization" call attention to this fact.

> When the crisis of the American Revolution came, Jefferson, Paine, John Adams, Washington, Franklin, Madison, and many lesser lights were to be reckoned among the Liberals or Deists. It was not Cotton Mather's God to whom the author of the declaration of independence appealed, it was to nature's God. From whatever source derived, the effect of both Unitarianism and Deism was to hasten the retirement of historic theology from its empire over the intellect of American leaders, and to clear the atmosphere for secular interests.

Beyond both political and the religious-philosophical ideas there were emerging others, destined to have a profound effect upon American history. Experience in the new world was bringing its first great harvest.

Let the significance of Abigail Adams' declaration of 1776 appear more clearly by seeing the whole picture. Abigail Smith was born in 1744, daughter of Parson Smith of Weymouth and Elizabeth Quincy. That gave her an almost sacrosanct family tradition. She was of the established order. Not many could call Colonel John Quincy, "Grandfather," or find themselves at home in such influential households. But by the time Abigail was eighteen she had a "spark" in the person of one John Adams, son of a respectable but ordinary farmer and shoemaker. To be sure John had graduated from Harvard College, but he had committed the great social error of choosing the law for his profession instead of the more influential and socially acceptable profession of the ministry. There was objection on social grounds to the marriage. But the spirit of '76 was running in Abigail Smith's veins, and she had something

to say about whom she was going to marry and why. Thus it happened that on October 25th, 1764, all the Nortons, and Quinceys and the Smiths assembled to see Mary Smith married to John Adams, son of a farmer, and himself a lawyer. Abigail's father preached the marriage sermon on the text, "For John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, yet ye say he hath a devil."

Then came her growing wisdom and expanding responsibilities of married life. Four children were born; part of the time they lived in Boston where John Adams earned reputation as a lawyer and as one of the most reliable, keen-minded, courageous young men among those in the colony who were becoming identified with the revolutionary spirit.

Abigail not only learned to care for her children, to care for the household, to spin and to weave; to share with her husband in the growing revolt; to meet the obligations of her social life; but she has also learned to manage the farm; to direct the men who worked it and supervise the finances of the farm and the house, so that, as public affairs demanded the attention of the farmer-lawyer, and took him away for weeks at a time, Abigail became the general manager. Perhaps her spirit towards all these obligations, is well illustrated by her charge to him to "take as good care of himself as is consistent with his public obligations." It may be that right here in this charge of Abigail Adams to John to take as good care of himself as is consistent with his public obligations that we discover the secret of that heroic struggle which both John Adams and John Quincey Adams waged against the predatory instincts of State Street and the equally predatory hordes that were to swing into governmental power with Andrew Jackson. There is a vast difference between a rugged and responsible individualism, and a ruggedly acquisitive individualism. The one says, "Take good care of yourself." The other says, "Take as good care of yourself as is consistent with your public obligations."

But a time of crisis was at hand. The incident at Lexington and Concord; the struggle at Bunker Hill and the death of Warren; the trenches at Dorchester Heights, manned by raw troops; the evacuation of Boston by the British who had left for parts unknown had become events of history. Abigail was running the farm, attending to business, keeping John informed concerning all things political and

military going on at home, and anxiously waiting the news as she pondered on the great revolt they were contemplating. John Adams was in Philadelphia. The play of persons and forces out of which was to come the Declaration of Independence was in full swing amid the sweltering heat and discomforts of that city. "Great things" John had written, "here were on the tapis."

From this same household out of which was emerging heresy in politics and religion, heresies in which, apparently, Abigail shared with John to the full limit both in understanding and support, there was sent this letter in 1776 from Abigail to John. It entitles Abigail Adams to the honor of being the first or among the first of the feminists in this country.

She said,

> I long to hear that you have declared for independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire that you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have not voice and representation.
>
> That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute; but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend. (John always addressed Abigail in letters as "My dearest Friend.") Why, then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity, with impunity? Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your sex; regard us then as beings placed by providence under your protection, and in imitation of the 'Supreme Being' make use of that power only for our happiness.

That is a remarkable letter. More than a century and a half have passed since it was written. Its main suggestions

are sound and grow as naturally out of the spirit of ’76 as did the Declaration of Independence itself. In that letter also speaks a fine a quality of womanhood as ever cared for a child or presided over a household.

The reply of John Adams is equally interesting, partly because of its disclosure of the intimate and humorous frankness that characterized their letters; and partly because it suggested the difficulties that her suggestion would meet with in its journey through the years ahead.

> I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians, and negroes grew insolent to their masters; but your letter is the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment, but you are so saucy, I won’t blot it out. Depend upon it we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power to its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and softly, and, in practice you know we are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather than give this up, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight; I am sure every good politician would plot as long as he could against despotism, empire, monarchy, aristocracy, and ochlocracy. A fine story indeed; I begin to think the ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up Tories, land jobbers, trimmers, bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Irish Roman Catholics, Scotch Renegadoes, they have at last stimulated the ladies to demand new privileges and threaten to rebel.

Such a delicious letter, and yet how characteristic of John Adams’ insight. So much then for Abigail Adams’ suggestion. Its growth and development into one of the major phases of modern life need not detain us. Those who have shared in its progress equally with those who have

feared its dangers are now concerned in its results. We jump the years to 1919, when Brooks Adams, descendent of Abigail comes forward with his criticism and judgement of what he calls the feminist movement of our times. It is of interest not alone because it comes from a descendent of Abigail Adams but also because it emerges from one of the most significant strains in American history, a strain of thought and a standard of disinterestedness to which we must return from our prodigal journey of ruggedly acquisitive individualism.

In that remarkable book, *The Degradation of Democratic Dogma,* in which Henry Adams sets forth a philosophy of History, Brooks Adams writes an introduction under the heading of "The Heritage of Henry Adams." In this Introduction, Brooks Adams, in speaking of Henry Adams' attitude towards the Reformation, says,

> He found the Reformation antagonistic, chiefly, I think, because of the Puritan attack on women; for it was during the Reformation that the Virgin was dethroned, and according to his theory, I take it, that the degradation of women began. … Now as a lawyer and a historian, I insist that society as an organism has little or no interest in woman's reason. But its very existence is bound up in her instincts. Intellectually, woman's reason has been a matter of indifference to men. As an intellectual competitor she has never been formidable; but maternity is a monopoly. It is the passionate instinct which is the cause and the effect of maternity, and which enable women to serve their great purpose as the cement of society.

Superficially it seems astounding that Brooks Adams a descendent of Abigail, the feminist, should utter such a statement. Searching as the statement is, I hasten to add, another much more vigorous and positive, less a philosophic generalization, and more closely related to actuality. In the year 1919, reviewing the affairs of the world from the point of view of a philosophy of history, and with an almost uncanny insight into the political and social outlook of the western world at that time, he presents the serious situation involved as the peace settlement seems to have been taken out of the hands of political authorities, and to have passed into the hands of money interests that lurked in the background. Then he goes on to say,

And yet, serious as this situation may appear to be in the light of the present unstable social equilibrium, it is naught beside the terrors which threatens our society, as at present organized, by the unsexing of women. Since the great industrial capitalistic movement began throughout the modern world toward 1830, the modern feminist has sought to put the woman upon a basis of legal equality at which she would be enabled, as it was thought, to become the economic competitor of man. At length, after nearly a century, and as one of the effects of the recent war, she seems to have succeeded in her ambition. So far as is possible the great sexual instinct has been weakened or suppressed. So far as is possible it is now ignored systematically in our education. Woman is ashamed of her sex and imitates the man. And the results are manifest enough to alarm the most optimistic and confiding. The effect has been to turn enormous numbers of women into the ranks of the lower paid classes of labor, but, far worse, in substance, to destroy the influence of women in modern civilization, save in so far as her enfranchisement tends to degrade the democratic level of intelligence. The woman, as the cement of society, the head of the family, and the centre [sic] of cohesion has, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. She has become a wondering isolated unit, rather a dispersive than a collective force.

Already the working of the poison is apparent in our system of law, and it is appalling. The family principle has decayed until, as a legal conception, it has ceased to exist. The father has no authority, the wife is absolutely independent and so are the children, save so far as the state exerts a modified control, as in the matter of education. (The graduated tax seeks to equalize the earning power of the individual, and the inheritance tax confiscates accumulations to the state.) The advanced feminist claims for the woman the right to develop herself according to her own will. She may decline to bear children, or, if she consents, she is to bear them to whom she may choose. If so, the state must regulate such matters, and the woman must be required to

> serve the state by bearing children as man serves the state in the army. The state must assume the education and cost of children, when so born, and must subsequently employ them at an average wage, all thus being put on an equality. Such is the manifest direction in which the efforts of our advanced feminists tend.

Thus Brooks Adams viewed the situation in 1919. We blink our eyes as we read, and wonder just what can be the matter with him, and just what is he trying to say, and just what [does what] he does say have to do with the actual facts and forces at play in the year 1932. Again we ask how could a descendent of Abigail Adams get so far off the track, and be so blind to the progress and improvement in women and in the status of women since 1776?

Of course we can paint a picture quite different in tone and color, the picture of the educated woman; the picture of the intelligent wife and mother, broad-minded, interested in all cultural and public affairs; charming companions of their husbands; fine and understanding friends of their healthy and robust children; well-versed in the affairs of state; capable, in an emergency, of taking over the economic burdens of the family; in short, all-round women of ability and integrity. Just the sort of woman that Abigail Adams was, and living under conditions more or less like the conditions that she suggested as desirable in her letter to John Adams in 1776. That also is part of the picture. There has been and there still is a majestic power and quality to the woman movement, Brooks Adams to the contrary notwithstanding.

We might go on to enlarge upon these facts by pointing out the achievements of women in the arts and sciences as well as in the industrial world, yet there remains too much of Brooks Adams' statement of 1919 that fits into the picture of our social disturbances of 1932 to permit us to pass it by with a shrug of the shoulder as the by-product of a burned soul. The trend and tone of much of the popular literature of the past fifteen years; the returns of the divorce courts; the preoccupation of many with new codes of morals; experiments in domestic relations; and a multitude of incidents registered not only in the tabloids but in the more conventional journals of opinion, are just such facts and tendencies as Brooks Adams could point to and say, "I told you so." The overshadowing of the home by the state in

the Russian experiment; the same tendency in this country, especially as it is revealed in matters of health and education; and in the weak spots disclosed under the pressure of the depression, point in the same direction. Or one might point to the many excessive fads and foibles of social life; the restless and hectic search for thrills and pleasure. The attitude here referred to is well-expressed by Katherine Brush in one of the popular journals of day. Writing under the title, "I refuse to take life seriously," she says,

> People who take life seriously take marriage seriously. In point of fact I'm inclined to believe that marriages taken lightly are more liable to last; chains worn loose are not so irksome. To take marriage seriously is to expect too much of it. We do better to realize that the institution is man-made, not divine, that husbands and wives are human beings, not angels.
>
> The people who take life seriously believe that it is important to check over their bank statement, to retire early and rise early, to remember, in telling an anecdote, whether it happened on Tuesday or Wednesday. To my mind these things and other things like them are pifflingly unimportant, even silly. Who cares whether it happened Tuesday or Wednesday? Why should anybody check over bank statements? The Bank is always right and I can prove it. I may sound flippant, but I am quite in earnest. As for early rising and early retiring, the first is not so bad if it follows the second, but the second is impossible. Most of the really exciting people I have ever known I have known after ten o'clock in the evening. And most of the really dramatic things I have seen, I've seen by artificial light. The mask of humanity slips a little at night, as at no other time. In the daytime we are all bisque.
>
> To live the moment joyously—surely this is wisdom. To feel the world is grand and glamorous, and lovely, and existence in it a thrill to be thankful for.

That is an interesting point of view. "Exciting people;" "dramatic things;" "artificial light;" "to live the moment joyously;" "a thrill to be thankful for." It has its appeal; many try it; few get very far with it. Perchance it

is the excess of this approach to life that has produced the great multitude of whom Walter Lippman speaks as "The women who have emancipated themselves from the tyranny of fathers, husbands, and homes, and with the intermittent but expensive help of a psychoanalyst, are now enduring liberty as interior decorators."

Not even Brooks Adams could write a more pungent sentence. The pity is that it fits into the picture. But just as the bank holds the balance, and, as Kathrine Brush says, is always right, so there is a balance in the nature of things to which we are held accountable even though the accounting may be a tragedy. We do even now catch the presence of another tone not only in written opinion, but in personal conversation. I pick up a man on the road. He tells me his story. Hunting for a job. Shoe cutter by trade. Used to make $38 to $40 per week. Wages now $18 per week, if he only could get a job. Possibility that his young wife, mother of four children, oldest five years, youngest ten months, may get a job in the factory where he is refused; hopes that because they want her, they will take him. Then both together may earn almost as much as he earned before. They will hire some elderly person to take care of the children. Taking it by and large how near right would Brooks Adams be in asserting that the result of woman in industry has been but to make it impossible for the husband to earn enough to maintain a home while she rears the children. Will the children die off, or will the Town or State step in to provide for them? I read a recent anonymous record of a woman who voluntarily chose a professional career; has been successful; but at fifty the zest of life has gone; she finds herself increasingly isolated from the main currents, as if, so to speak, she were slowly moving out onto a promontory of existence alone, conscious that the life strain that for eons has been finding its way into her person's ends. It is tragic but the balance is exhausted. The memory of a million thrills does not atone. Another in "Ten Years After the Divorce," [by] Anonymous strikes another strain, and brings us back from a world of disillusion and discontent, wise with a wisdom that perchance only a suffering experience can attain.

> But we could go on together trying to understand each other, sometimes perhaps succeeding. Always we should wait for our boy's train together, and together we should do what we could to make the life for which we are mutually

> responsible a happy one. Together we should give him the comfort he now lacks of happy parents, a comfort which is the tragic quietly desperate need of every child.
>
> If I had to do it over again, I would not divorce my husband, but this is a fact I should not confess to a single living soul.

These anonymous confessions that are beginning to appear, linked to a similar strain that finds a place in popular literature are not miraculous accidents. It was inevitable that they should appear, as inevitable as the return of the wild animal to the salt licks. Surely Brooks Adams is right in his emphasis upon the instinctive monopolistic character and quality of maternity.

For individual reasons or because of limitations and unavoidable obligations some women may miss the opportunity of domestic relations and responsibilities. But the instinct of the race, of all living things, is back of the sentence, "Together we should give him the comfort he now lacks of happy parents, a comfort which is the tragic, quietly desperate need of every child." Here and there individuals may try to thwart it; may seek thrills; and careers; diversions and dramatic episodes; even cults may be established, and movements may be started that we may escape from our bondage of child bearing and domestic relations, but the naked truth is that we are packed with the pulse of an unborn race. The freedom that Abigail Adams sought was not a freedom from a functional instinct and its obligations, but freedom for its fulfillment and escape from its perversions. The tide has turned; the confessions of anonymous writers will increase. As time goes on the courage to publicly acknowledge a mistake and seek to rectify it will be added unto the initial fact of recognizing it in secret. The Hounds of Heaven are on the trail.

What the results? Will woman again be chained to the sink and the wash-tub? Will she again become the slave of man's passionate whims? Will her excursion into the realms of science, the fine arts, and her achievements in education be forgotten? That does not seem to be the alternative. The fruits of one hundred and fifty years in the education and emancipation of woman have some contribution to make. While many difficult and baffling problems loom, it seems somewhat safe to make one or two generalizations.

The first one would be that, however difficult it may be to attain, the marriage relations will continue to be free, increasingly, of the domination of either over the other. The difficulties of adjustment in the marriage relations are great, and challenge the quality of the best of persons. But as time goes on and we become more naturally the children of our modern world, we shall learn that differences and difficulties are not the occasion for fight and divorce, but the occasion for understanding and adjustment. Such understanding and adjustment will be the easier because of the contribution which is coming to the problem by the greater freedom, the broader experience and better general education of woman. There exists the possibility of a greater companionship. Added to this is the probability that there is developing a growing appreciation on the part of both men and women, that all industrial activities, all arts and sciences, all social developments derive their final significance from the contribution that they may make to the coming generation. The movement is in the direction of marriage as cooperative venture. Perhaps the danger that threatens here is the extent to which the state may seek to intervene and rob the venture of its full responsibilities and thus curtail the possible richness of the relationship. At the moment the impinging of the state upon the individual and the family seems to threaten.

In the second place, it seems probable that just as women live a freer life, and have a broader understanding of affairs, and seem to be unearthing the deeper implications of their functional monopoly, so they will come to regard their privilege as mothers in a much broader and far-reaching light. All of Abigail Adams' activities and interests were in her life as Wife and mother. "Milk-maid, housewife, successful farmer, weaver, teacher, wife, mother; and withal when conditions demanded, she had taken her place beside the Ambassador to Great Britain, and as First Lady of the Land;" she had entered into the revolution and had made the political and social movements of the times her own because they were all a part of her great and pervasive life-work as wife and mother; they were expressions not only of herself, but of the lives and the nation that she and John Adams were bringing to fruition. It seems clear that in increasing numbers women will see their relationships to society, not so much as opportunities for exploitation, as chances for a career of

an experience, but as expressions of their monopolistic function. It will be primarily as mothers that they will reach out into the community and cast the weight of the influence in its development. Increasingly, also, I believe, those women who for various reasons do not become actual mothers will bend their influence into activities and interests that will enable them to satisfy vicariously the maternal instinct, and make perhaps one of the greatest contributions of all.

In other words all the king's horses and all the kings' men cannot divert the human race from its functional march. Increasing intelligence and deeper experience serves to broaden the foundations, and enrich the relationships that exist between men and women as bearers and rearers of children together.