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Title: "Shall Women Enter the Law," by Jessica D. Longsdorff

Format: Commencement Oration

Date: June 16, 1891

Location: Orations-1891-L857s

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Shall women enter the Law?

Some time ago in the course of a conversation on the propriety of admitting women to the Bar, a leading lawyer of this town said to me, "In my judgment it would be a wise thing so to do. I would like to see it."

Such an assertion from such a source, sounds rather startling when we consider what an infinite amount of effort it has required to secure for women the privileges which they already enjoy. What, but a few years

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in successful result, in
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work itself and in its influence on themselves.

This fact is so well known and acknowledged, that it would be the merest reiteration to dwell upon it.

The croakers who once saw only ruin and degradation in these successive steps are silent now, or only open their lips in recantation of their former opinions. Hospitals and schools, newspapers, and popular literature, projects of reform and philanthropy, are confessedly improved in scope and method, as well as more thoroughly

and economically conducted. These are the tangible and irresistible proofs of the extent to which humanity has been lifted up during the period in which she has been permitted to play her legitimate part in the drama of human life. In all these changes the "work has proven the workman" so well that today, some schoolboys and "old fogies" venture to discuss that eloquent subject - woman's sphere.

But, there are still barriers to be leveled. In the future, as in the

past, each foot of vantage ground must be won by actual conquest. No free gift of grace, or grant of courtesy is ever ours. If we want a privilege we must fight for it, and the history of the past has shown us what to expect in such a contest. Every prejudice every idea nailed cleated and hammered down by immemorial custom, every old, moth-eaten relic of mock propriety, and false assumption of delicacy, — hoarded away from times far different from the present, are

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With respect to the Law - it
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That the Court is no place
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est ears! That rude manners
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which ordinarily govern social intercourse are ignored.

In this connection however might it not be well for these gallant gentlemen to remember that notwithstanding the coarseness and rudeness alleged to prevail in these so-called temples of justice she is not thereby exempted from the necessity of giving and hearing testimony in which as all know lies so largely the indelicacy of which they so bitterly complain. For the time being she becomes the central point of the gaze of the lowest rabble who cannot be

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As long as wrong and crime
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tions to society and to the state are identical with those of man; and there are very few whose lives are so hedged in, as not to see the giant form of sin, stalking abroad in open noon-day - or hear the groans of those who have fallen into his toils. The newspapers we read retail it - the streets we walk witness it; the prisons and almshouses whose shadows lie across our daily walks tell only too well the dark story of human depravity. The pulpit - more than hurls at it in pointing out

its remedy. - Legislation directs its strongest efforts to mitigate its ravages. Alas! alas, vice and crime and suffering meet us at every step. We cannot shut ourselves out from it - because we are women, and our lives supposedly more remote from the roar of the world's battle field; nor would it be worthy or wise to be blind or indifferent to it. Rather should we seek for new remedies and better ways to lighten the common burden.

So long as women - sad to say - must come into

the court-room as prisoners
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Can only be properly understood and appreciated by women, and they should be thoroughly educated how best to present them in these lights. They alone can touch upon circumstances and reasons which appear only to such as hold the key to the inner nature of the actor, and so the results of trials might often be vastly more honorable and just.

There are also questions of property rights, and business transactions which might be reasonably relegated to female legal

advisers, and such advice would be more readily sought from one of their own sex.

The actual work of a lawyer is not unadapted to a woman's strength. It is not so exposed as the physician's work, - or so laborious and unremitting as that of the teacher. There is in fact, no good reason against their being to the practice of this profession, - the one most frequently urged being only that much used and much abused one of impropriety. Impro-

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 of fancy and of prejudice
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Rather let men be generous
 Rather let them extend

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Jessie Dale Longsdorf
 Dickinson College - June 16th, 91

Commencement Oration of Jessica Dale Longsdorff, Class of 1891
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

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remedies and better ways to lighten the common burden. So long as women – sad to say – must come into

the court-room as prisoners – so long as they are required to give testimony without any interposition of primacy – so long as the jury system prevails – so long as men make the laws and men interpret them from the bench – so long in brief as laws, courts, and human nature itself – are first what they are, will it be eminently right and proper that women should be advocates, as well as witnesses. A woman lawyer would in some sort be a shield for the

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priety! Of all the figments of fancy and of prejudice coming down to use from a past the world is fast out-growing what more unworthy and absurd than this, of making the great question of the enjoyment of equal rights and privilege in this free and enlightened age – turn upon a score so utterly false and untenable as this of propriety or impropriety – particularly of impropriety which exists only in the imaginations of our opponents.

Rather let men be generous. Rather let them extend

to women destined with them for a full share of the storm and stress of life's great battle – the helping hand and the cheering word, confident that in so doing, they will but place her in the position of a competitor in a contest – the rewards of which are only those who shall win them;

and in the pursuence of which she asks but an equal chance in a field equally fair for all who shall engage.

Jessica Dale Longsdorff
Dickinson College – June 16th, '91