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Shall women Enter the Law? Home time ago in the course of a convensation on the mo-I priety of admitting toomen to the Bar a leading Lawyon of this town said to me; In my fridgment it would be a wise thing so to do I would tike to see it," Such an assertion how Such a Source Sorbuds rather startling when we Consider what an infinite amount of effort it has regnied to secure for Women the privileges which they already enjoy That but a few byedly

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restrained from making her The subject of remark checker does her sex save her from being from beaten by the law. -yels engaged whoh the case Her statements are as nig. idly sometimized her verdity as readily unprigned. her delicacy as unhesitatingly shocked as if no such fution existed as "twomanly security" This is verily the merest subter a false issue - a mere harady whon fine sentiment As Hong as horong and come exist then Consequences musy be faced willingly or him - willingly. homan's obliga

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ils remedy, Legislation ducies its strongest efforts to mil igate ils rarages. Alas ales, wice and Jonne and suffering meet us at erely stell, he cannot shut ordiselses out from it be - Cause we are women, and our tires supposedly more remote from the roar of The world's battle field. nor would it be worthy or were to be blind on midif - Jerent to it. Rather should we seek for new remedie and better ways to tighten The common burden Go long as wornen-sad to say must come wito

the court - room as presones -so long as they are re_ - grined to give testimony Without lany wheeposi -tron of punday - so long as the Juny system pre - wails so long as men make the laws and men interpret Them from The bench so long in brig as Laws, Courts, and human nature itself are frust what They are will it be Immently right-and proper Whalf women should be advocates as well as witnesses A woman Lawyer would . - in some sort be a shield for the

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advisers, and such selvice would be more readily sought from one of their orbu sec. The actual work of a lawyer is not briedapted to be woman's strength. If is not so exposed as the physicians work or so lalborious and unesmitten as that of the beecher! Where is hi fact, no good reason against their being to the practice of this pro-- Jession the one most trequently urged being only That which used used and much abused one of impropriety. Mupropriety! Of all the figurent of flancy and of prefudice Coming down to us from a fast the world is fast out-growing what more unworther and abound the this, of busking the great question of the enfoyment of egnal rights and printege In this feel and enlightened age tun lipon a score too utterly false and unter able and this of propuely or impropriety - particularle af unpropriety which exists louly m' The Imaginations of Jour opponduto. Mather let men til generous Rather let them extend

to women destined with Them for a full share of the storm and shess of life's great ballle - the helping hand and the cheering word lon fident that in so doing They will but place her her the position of a competi-- for in a coultes 1- the reward of which are only those who Ishall win then; and hi The pursuence of which she asks but an equal fan for all who hall the gage. Dickinson Collège fine 164, 91 Commencement Oration of Jessica Dale Longsdorff, Class of 1891
Transcribed by Christine Rosenberry, May 2002
Edited by Don Sailer, September 2009

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

comparatively have passed since they were recognized as fitted to fill the various grades of the teacher's profession; what – a still shorter time has elapsed since they were permitted to enter the ranks of the medical fraternity; and that even more recently they have been admitted to an accredited position in journalism. In all these hardly won places they have securely held their own – both in knowledge, in dignity, in skilful work, in successful result, in relation both to the work

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 ample and irrestible 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 to-day, same 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

brought forward, and flaunted in the face of those who are able and willing to conduct the Campaign of time progress. There are still the practically closed doors of theology and the law, I say practically closed, for, it – is true that they are both left a little way ajar; first enough to give a daring woman a peep into the wide domain beyond. But, they are well guarded, Regiments and battalions of grave and reverend Doctors of Divinity are clutching the theological door and holding

it shut against the assaults of the devoted few who would like to batter down with it, all illiberality and prejudice of every description.

With respect to the Law – it should be observed – what – the question is one largely of expediency, the experiment having already been made and the right <u>as a right</u> tested. Some say – chivalrous but mistaken souls; that the court is no place for a woman, because much that transpires there is coarse and therefore unfit for modest ears; that rude manners prevail – that – the restrictions

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 he's 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

restrained from making her the subject of remarks, neither does her sex save her from being brow-beaten by the lawyers engaged upon the case. Her statements are as rigidly scrutinized, her veracity as readily impugned – her delicacy as unhesitatingly shocked as if no such friction existed as "womanly security". This is verily the merest subter, a false issue – a mere parody upon fine sentiment. As long as <u>wrong</u> and <u>crime</u> exist, then consequences must be faced willingly or un-willingly. Woman's oblige-

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 forms of $\underline{\sin}$, stalling abroad in open noon-day – or hear the groans of those who have fallen into his Evils. The newspapers we read detail 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 hints at it in pointing out

its remedy; legislation directs its strongest efforts to mitigate its savages. 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 <u>prisoners</u> – 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

baffled woman witness – a woman lawyer would in some sense a protection and safe-guard for the wretched woman prisoner forsaken and forlorn as only such a woman can be. A woman lawyer would be able to appeal, from a different standpoint to the too often prejudiced jury man. She would bring a new factor and possibly a clearer vision into what is after all more a contest of wills than a desire for justice.

There are often Law-cases affecting women which

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

advisors, 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 the fact, no good reason against there being to the practice of this profession – the one most frequently urged being only that much used used and much abused one of impropriety. Impro-

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 unteniable 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