

**Where are Canadian Women Going—
Back to Their Homes or Continue in
Business Life?**

By Louise C. McKinney

Canadian Home Journal, August 1919

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Where are Canadian Women Going—Back to Their Homes or Continue in Business Life?

By Louise C. McKinney.

Woman's work and woman's sphere have always furnished a favorite topic of conversation. Her activities and resourcefulness during the war exploded many of the old theories and gained for her many of the privileges which for years she had claimed to be her right. Now that the war is over the public mind is seized with a new dread, and the subject for popular comment is whether woman will be willing to relinquish her new-found liberty and wider sphere of activity and resume her place as home-maker in the same old way, or will she continue to claim her present place in the industrial world and thus constitute one more of the already numerous after-the-war problems.

This, it is argued, would be a double tragedy, because she would turn her back upon home life and would at the same time keep out of employment vast numbers of men who would otherwise be needed in the various positions now occupied by women.



LOUISE C. MCKINNEY
Canada's First Woman
Member of Parliament.

(Transcriber Note: Photo caption is inaccurate as she was the first woman elected to a Canadian Legislature.)

I have unbounded confidence in the women of Canada and in the future of Canada and also in the modern woman movement, and therefore have not the slightest doubt that present conditions are merely a phase of the question that will eventually work out for good and not for evil.

Speaking of lessons learned from the war, there is one lesson that has become quite commonplace—it has been stated so frequently and accepted so unquestioningly. It is this—that the real strength of our men in Europe was their wonderful “morale,” which was due not only to the high moral purpose for which they were fighting, but also to the morale of the people at home; indeed, it was this spirit at home that made possible the spirit of our men in France.

Another lesson that has not been given quite so much prominence, but is nevertheless quite as true, is this: The signing of peace terms and the forming of a League of Nations will be effective in maintaining peace only in so far as there is developed within the various nations involved those ideals that make for peace. Following this thought a little further, we are ready to admit that such a task can be undertaken by no machinery of government unless that government has back of it a people of strong moral purpose, and such a people can be produced by no other means than through the homes of the nation.

Then, what is the message that comes clear and strong to the women of Canada to-day—a message that transcends in importance any other that may press its claims upon us? It is simply this—if Canada is to maintain her place among the nations of the world—a place purchased by the splendid sacrifice of her noble sons and the equally splendid courage of their heroic mothers—she must continue to foster the institution that gave birth to her greatness—the Christian home; and her women can perform no higher form of national service than this.

But how are we going to reconcile this with woman’s present ideas regarding her work? For answer, let us pause and ask another question. What, after all, is the purpose of woman’s life? The purpose of woman’s life is just the same as the purpose of man’s life—that she may make the best possible contribution to the generation in which she is living. Then, why all the striving and unrest? The answer to this is two-fold. First, we have failed too often to recognize this purpose and have felt we were here to seek our own pleasure—in other words, that it was ours to be ministered unto and not to minister, or to get out of the world as much as possible in the line of comfort and give in return as little as possible in the line of service.

The second cause of unrest is one that probably accounts in great measure for the first, and, whether the individual woman was conscious of it or not, was

and is at the bottom of all her struggles for wider liberty. This is the desire for recognition as an individual; and no person can possibly develop his best or contribute his best unless such recognition is given. Now that such recognition is given, we must admit that every woman has a right to choose the way in which she can best make her contribution to society, nor do we believe that we are running any risk by so doing, for the average woman will continue to feel that her contribution can best be made through the medium of the home, not because woman is so intensely patriotic that she deliberately makes this choice, but because, in the very nature of things, it is so, and the average woman instinctively loves home life. So my message is intended not so much to persuade women to enter homes as, having done so, to recognize the dignity and importance of that which they have undertaken, and to remember that any task is noble which in any way tends to improve home conditions or minister to the comfort of those included in the home circle.

In support of my statement that the average woman will choose home rather than business life, I may cite the opinion of a prominent business man who, in giving reasons why girls in certain positions were not so satisfactory as men, said the underlying cause, as he saw it, was the fact that there was a lack of permanency in the thought of the women since few, if any of them, intended to make this particular work their life occupation. While this is not the case in all lines of industry, yet it was particularly true in the occupation under discussion, and probably explains more of our difficulties than we are ready to admit.

But this is aside from the question, and we return to a point raised at the beginning as to whether woman will resume the task of home-making in the same old way, and we unhesitatingly say that we believe and sincerely hope that she will not, for while the essentials of home and home life must ever remain the same, yet every influence that broadens and dignifies the life of woman will at the same time broaden and dignify our ideas and ideals regarding the home and will give us added power to carry into operation the ideas we have acquired. And it is truly wonderful how our conception of woman as an individual and of home-making as a dignified and worth-while occupation will enter into every department of life and revolutionize our whole method of thinking.

Incidentally, we might note that when this higher conception of woman and home grips our people, there will automatically disappear from our thinking the idea that woman must marry "to be supported," and with it will go many of the false and pernicious ideas that for too long have held sway; while the new sense of the importance of her lifework will naturally make her more

careful in the selection of a partner in her sacred task. This in itself would raise the moral tone of our manhood to an immeasurable degree.

In these days of complex social conditions it is difficult to adjust ourselves to circumstances, for the home has so many rivals in its demands upon our time; yet I believe that applying the principle we have just enunciated, will prove a wonderful aid in the solution of our problems. If home-making is the chief business of life, worthy of the best efforts of the most talented woman, then home tasks are no longer hopeless drudgery, nor home ties fetters to bind one to earth while she would fain soar to greater heights. But woman is coming to apply scientific management to household affairs. It is clearly a poor business proposition for her to spend in manual labor the time and energy that could more profitably be given to other matters included in the care of her family, while the application of modern methods would accomplish the work quite as well and possibly better and leave her physically and mentally fit for other duties. If it is good practical business policy for men in every line of business and industry to make use of the latest approved methods and labor-saving devices, then why not for the housewife as well? For a wife and mother must be prepared to give herself—not only to live for her family, but to live with them, if she is to succeed in putting into their lives that which will fit them for life.

During many of the years of her life it is undoubtedly true that the major portion of a woman's time must be given to her family, but we have made the serious mistake of thinking that this meant sinking her identity wholly in theirs and confining her interest to the four walls of her home—a mistake that has been fatal in its results. Some of the most successful mothers we have known have never lost touch with outside interests and not a few of them have even had "careers."

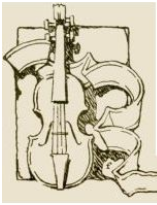
THERE is no question to-day, social, financial or religious, that does not touch your home or the homes of the nation. What about the young men and women about us, as well as the young mothers in our midst, who need to come in friendly sympathetic touch with people of your ideals? Is our educational system just what will best fit our children for citizenship? If the girls of to-day are to be efficient mothers, are their working hours, the conditions under which they work and the remuneration they receive such as to make this possible, or are we permitting the greed or shortsightedness of employers to mortgage the future of our homes?

If it is true that many men cannot marry because their income will not permit it, should we not interest ourselves in helping to make it possible for

every young man to receive sufficient education—academic or technical—to fit him for earning an honorable living and then demand that the living wage will be sufficient to support wife and family? Since many women will either from choice or from force of circumstances, continue to earn a living outside the home, are we not in duty bound to stand for the principle of equal pay for equal work? And would not more women be willing to give up their business careers and enter homes of their own if the principle of economic independence for women were established by law? The housing problem, the question of public health, the fight against venereal disease, the overthrow of the liquor traffic are all matters of vital interest to women, because of their direct bearing on the home. All of these, and numerous other questions that suggest themselves to you, will lead us far afield and deep into social and political problems, both national and international, but why should we not be interested in all of these?

IF woman is to succeed in developing strong moral principles in her family she will keep in close touch with God and the church. I have never been willing to admit that women were essentially more religious than men, and yet I do hold that the woman who fosters a religious atmosphere in the home has done much to anchor and strengthen the life of the husband, and to make it possible for him to be strong and true in the strain and worry of business life; and father, mother and children all need to cultivate the spiritual and to identify themselves with the church of God, as the recognized agency for developing high ideals and fostering a love for and a vital interest in our fellow men, both of which find their highest expression in service.

Nor would I be understood as dwelling too much on the thoughtful and serious, and neglecting the play life, for physical and mental fitness presupposes a balanced life with a reasonable amount of recreation, and the wise woman will not overlook this fact. Just let us remember that our task is a noble one, and that in its accomplishment we have the assurance that all the powers of the universe are at our command, if we but link ourselves with the Divine, and that for a reward we have the joy of accomplishment as well as the pleasure of association with our dear ones from day to day. Could any life be narrow or colorless with such a prospect ahead?



TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Where are Canadian Women Going--Back to Their Homes or Continue in Business Life?* by Louise C. McKinney]