

# The Nation.

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## **WOMEN ACTUALLY IN OFFICE.**

That the West was much less surprised than the East by the election of a woman to Congress may be assumed not only from the greater progress of woman suffrage there, but from the frequency with which women have come to be elected to office in suffrage States. Particularly in Nebraska, Colorado, and Montana women hold municipal and county offices. In Colorado a woman is now State Superintendent of Education. In Kansas, at the last election, there were 258 women candidates, and within a few months 155 women will take charge of various local offices. Twelve years ago less than ten women held office in Kansas; now the State has only seventeen counties in which some woman has not been elected. It is natural to find that 59 are superintendents of public instruction; but there are also 47 registers of deeds, 15 county treasurers, three probate judges, and even one coroner. In many States of the Middle West women have long held office as trustees of the State University; the number in suffrage States who are clerks of court is large.

All this has taken place so quietly as to argue its entire naturalness. In general, the women seek either educational offices or those that require clerical ability. The campaign for such offices is usually confined to newspaper advertisements or notices, and the women have been chosen simply because they were regarded as better than the men who competed with them. It is not the distinction that has appealed, but simply the chance to open a new livelihood and a new field of service. It is probable that the amount of office-holding by women will increase markedly in suffrage States, especially in branches relating to health, charities and correction, and general social service. This does not warrant the fears of those who believe, with Frederic Harrison, that women would make a foolish attempt to achieve what are really the lesser honors within their grasp. Nor is there justification for those who are ready to claim for woman an exaggerated share in public administration. One set of writers has contended that women were entitled to a large share of such activities because they brought to them a different focus and valuation from those of man, one more unselfish and "ra-



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those of man, one more unselfish and "racial," and because society needed this "binocular vision." The Western women have not proceeded on theories of this sort. They have merely shown that—to use phrases of Julia Ward Howe's—"women of sound intellect, of reputable life, having the same stake and interest in the well-being of the community that others have," wish to demonstrate their ability to advance that well-being in certain offices.

The continued election of women to minor offices may be taken as showing that suffrage has increased the number of those from whom fit choices can be made. There is no evidence that the offices are more poorly administered than before. And the entrance of women into fields like that of county education has lessened the contentious spirit of party politics and personal struggle. When women venture into the contest, the electorate studies the merits of the candidates more closely, and with more feeling, conscious or unconscious, for public service. Office-holding is a stimulus to the interest of women in the local governmental affairs in which they can be immediately useful. We know something of the activities of women's clubs in bettering the conditions of the reformatory and prison in Kansas. In a State where women hold office, the vast body of them who would never think of doing so will still find a new impulse to the study of governmental affairs. An Ella Flagg Young is the means of making thousands of women think of the schools. The concern of women with justice and charity, with public recreation, with libraries and museums, with fire and police protection, with city planning, with municipal efficiency, may thus be heightened in any smaller city. In the country a few women in county office will heighten the regard for community centres and better schools.

The due bounds of office-holding by women are hardly to be defined, but will be felt instinctively. That they will not often be passed, we may depend upon voters of both sexes. Generally welcomed as has been the new representative of women's interests in Congress, and prominent as women like Ella Flagg Young, Katharine B. Davis, and Julia Lathrop have become, the number of women in high office will long be comparatively few.