

The Saturday Review

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The Women Are Coming!

UNKNOWN to the majority of women in this country, a steadily mounting feminist campaign is under way for Equal Rights for women under the Constitution. The average man will regard this statement with bewilderment. They have the vote, haven't they? They are omnipresent in almost every business and industry; they are slowly entering professions from which they were formerly rigidly excluded. A quarter of the entire labor force of America is now made up of girls and women. They are supposed to own a good deal more than two-thirds of the wealth of the nation, due to the long habit of men of endowing their wives with an insurance policy, a legacy, and in some cases, with alimony. What more do they want? An occasional apprehensive male looks over his shoulders at an advancing tidal wave of restless and perhaps menacing women and mutters "matriarchy" under his breath.

Nothing would have served the feminist cause better than the attacks that were leveled on the American woman during the last eighteen months. The old form of feminism which won women equal suffrage in England and America was almost inevitably founded on competition with male workers. During the war women flooded into industries and the armed services, were applauded as self-sacrificing heroines. They were startled when the inevitable attempt to send them back where they came from took the form of ridicule or a psychiatric study of their inadequacies and their neuroses in the public press. A book by a well-known woman psychiatrist, "Woman, the Lost Sex," became a best seller and a storehouse of arguments for the anti-feminist crusade. Since most of this literature was both logical and apparently scientifically sound, it was effective in persuading many women to lose confidence in themselves and in what they may have unconsciously conceived as their destiny.

This attack was answered in the end in women's magazines and in innumerable women's clubs. Since it was leveled against the American mother as well as the working woman, it was absurdly contradictory. They couldn't both be dangerous to the American way of life. It became obvious that the working woman was living in a home of some sort that she had created for herself or her family, and there was no room for her back on the farm or in her parents' city apartment. The "career woman" who received the brunt of the assault turned out on reflection to be simply a woman who had succeeded in business. Therefore, ambition and success

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were supposed to be right for a man, but wrong for a woman. It could be shown that as many men as women were consulting psychiatrists, and that men were more susceptible to stomach ulcers.

The attack failed, but it succeeded in giving a new impetus to the cause of woman's rights and to a growing enthusiasm for the new feminist program that had been quietly taking the place of the old rivalry with the male sex. The goal is now partnership with men in the economic, political, and domestic life of the country. But before this program can become a vital and even resistless force, certain existing legal, economic, or educational inequalities in several states must be done away with one by one, or destroyed in one blow by the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment could hardly be stated more simply. "Equality under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Three months ago the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee recommended seven-to-one that the Amendment "do pass," and it may again be a part of the Democratic and Republican platforms. The ladies who besieged the embattled and doubtless embarrassed Senators in April may find out again that this is an election year promise. It is notable that Senator Taft has proposed what was oddly called "The Biological Status Bill," as if women had to fight in defense of their biological functions. This bill was the reverse of the medal. Senator Arthur Capper of Kansas, sponsor in the Senate of the Equal Rights Amendment, was the first witness against the Taft proposal that it should be made "the declared policy of the United States to permit in law and its administration distinction on the basis of sex . . . such as are reasonably justified by differences in physical structure, biological, or social function." You do not have to be a feminist to see to what prejudices and discriminations this might lead in the future, since even in an atomic age, women will fortunately remain women.

It is still true that as women they have little protection under the law, since what rights have been given to them can as easily be taken away by legislative action in the various states. An embittered woman writer has recently said, "The only right that women actually have is not to be lynched for their sex."

Most fair-minded men and women must approve of this fight for equality of opportunity under the Constitution. But when the Equal Rights Amendment has been passed, what will women want next? The answer is simple. They will want politics to be opened to them freely as a career. It is absurd that we should have only seven women, including the widows

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of former "incumbents" in our House of Representatives, while newly organized states such as India and the nations behind the Iron Curtain have many times that number as legislators, and have women as ministers of government and even as ambassadors. That one of our Representatives who took her husband's place is certain in November to be the second woman ever elected to the Senate merely emphasizes the inadequacy of feminine representation in our Government. This year marks another milestone in this direction. For the first time it has been seriously proposed, then accepted by a likely candidate of one of the major parties, that Mrs. Roosevelt might be acceptable as Vice President of the United States.

To equip themselves to enter politics women must be trained for the rough and tumble of partisan strife from the ground up. They must be present at party meetings, besiege the electorate, and fight their way through town councils and local political appointments to state and national legislatures. They must learn how to think and speak eloquently, though it is to be hoped that they will not practise their speeches at home. If we insist that women are not people but only a biologically and legally differentiated sex, let us take the consequences when they vote as women. A matriarchy? There might at least be fewer wars.

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