

## Abigail the Feminist.

The late Albert E. Pillsbury bequeathed certain funds to Harvard University and other institutions of learning with the stipulation that the income of said funds be used to combat the feminist movement. To date both Harvard University and Columbia University have refused to accept the bequests so conditioned. But this curious incident serves to introduce us to ~~extreme~~ the consideration of a question that has been much in evidence of late. We are much given in these days to what is called the evaluation of many things. We are constantly evaluating democracy, philosophy, science and religion. Also as sundry books and magazine articles indicate we are engaged in the process of evaluating that most interesting and indeed significant movement for which the word feminism is a very



general symbol. It covers the changed and changing status of women in our changed and changing social order. What are the gains and losses and whither are we going ? All sorts of questions hover about the fringe. Is there any gain ? Is the present tendency as some assert in the direction of disintegration of domestic life and the degradation of relations between men and women to the low plane of casual undisciplined impulse ? or are we some what blindly, but nevertheless ~~xxxxxxxx~~ with a high degree of integrity and disciplined purpose working our way through to more wholesome and stable standard of domestic life, and therefore , to a more wholesome and stable social order. Such are the questions that are in my mind. For a long time I have wanted the opportunity of making a suggestion or two on this subject.



The surveyor in laying out a road sets his instrument up on a given spot, carefully adjusts . Then he turns it backward to some selected point which he has marked by a pin driven into the ground ~~unsuccessfully~~ whose location is made visible by a little red flag tied to the pin. Having thus got his bearings to turn ~~h~~ his transit forward, to discover where the line of direction that he ~~unsuccessfully~~ has surveyed will land him, what obstacles he can discover , and how they may be overcome.

Therefore I am setting up my transit on a spot of substantial solid ground in the midst of our somewhat confused , and in ~~x~~ spots swampy soil of domestic relations and the status of women in modern society. I am turning that instrument back upon a little red flag that marks the spot where in the year 1776 abigail Adams drove a pin of historic significance along the roadway

that we have been surveying in this country for these three hundred years. That Pin was planted in Braintree, Mass. ~~in the year~~ on the site of the old houses , ~~which were the birthplace of the first and second Presidents of the United States~~ now standing, one of which was the birthplace of John Adams , second President of the United States, and the other the ~~birth~~ house in which Abigail gave birth to John Quincy Adams. We might almost say that Abigail drove the pin by the front step of that house from which she bade John Adams god speed on his many journeys of danger and hardship for the nation to which he contributed more than we have yet understood.

But before you take a look at that little red flag securely attached to the pin by the doorstep, let me recall ~~xxxxxx~~ two ~~interesting~~ important considerations.



First there is Abigail herself, -interesting enough in her own right, apart from the light that she may throw on our problem. Let me commend to your attention the book from which in the main I have gathered most of my facts, Abigail Adams, the second first lady by Dorothea Bobbè. I am depending upon the author for facts but do not hold the author responsible for interpretation.

Abigail was born in 1744, daughter of Parson Smith of Weymouth and Elizabeth Quincy, That gave her an almost ~~royal~~ sacrosanct family tradition to live up to. Not many could call <sup>John</sup> Colonel Quincy Grandpa, or find themselves at home in such influential households. But by the time Abigail was eighteen she had "spark" in the person on one John Adams, son of a respectable but nevertheless ordinary farmer. To be sure John had graduated at Harvard College, but he had committed the great social error



-6- choosing the law for his profession

instead of following the more influential and socially acceptable profession of the ministry. However could the Quincys, the Nortons, the Smiths permit the marriage of one of their blood with a young lawyer, son of a farmer. But Abigail, the feminist, revolting youth ~~and~~ whose veins the spirit of '76 was running, had something to say about the matter. So it happened that in spite of all opposition ~~position~~ on the 25th day of October, 1764. the Quincys the Nortons, the Tyngs assembled at Weymouth to listen to the Marriage sermon preached by an adoring father as Abigail ~~the daughter~~ Smith became the wife of John Adams, lowly farmer and despised lawyer. The whimsical and devoted father blessed with a keen sense of humor, preached from the text, - " For John came neither eating bread not drinking wine, yet ye say 'he Hath a Devil.'"

By the time Abigail planted her pin in 1776. she had become



Abby, born in 1765 ; John Qunicky , born in 1767, and destined to become the sixth President ; Charles and Thomas. They had lived for a time in Brattle Square in Boston where John Adams the young lawyer, and gained for himself reputation of being <sup>one of</sup> the most reliable, keen-minded, courageous young men among those in the colony who were becoming identified with revolutionary spirit.

Abigail had learned not only to care for the household, to spin and to weave; to share with her husband in the growing revolt; to meet the obligations of her social life; but she had also learned to manage the farm; direct the men who worked it and supervise the finances of the farm and house, so that, as public affairs demanded the attention of the farmer-lawyer, took him away for weeks at a time, Abigail became a woman of affairs. Perhaps her spirit and attitude towards all these obligations that fell upon her, and the wider obligations that fell upon John is well







say,- " When the crises " of the American Revolution" came , Jefferson, Paine. John Adams, Washington, Franklin, Madison, and many lesser lights were to be reckoned among either the Unitarians or the Deists. It was not Cotton Mather's God to whom the author of the declaration of independence appealed, it was to ~~his~~ nature's God. From whatever source derived , the effect of both Unitarianism and Deism was to hasten the retirement of historic Theology from its empire over the intellect of American Leaders, and to clear the atmosphere for secular interests."

Beyond both the political, and the religious qualities were other social ideas and ideals emerging from the one hundred and fifty years of colonial life. Among them, by no means least, closely related to both political and religious interests, and destined to profoundly effect by the great industrial revolution that was already in process, was this great problem and



movement, the changed and changing status of women, and the modifications upon domestic life and social institutions. Now after ~~x~~ this long and rambling preliminary, we are about to loook through the transit and get a picture of Abigail driving in her pin, and tieing the little red flag to it.

Lexington, and Concord, Bunker Hill, the deather of Warren; Dorchester Heights, had been taken by the raw troops: The Brittish had evacuated Boston, leaving for parts unknown. John Adams was in Philadelphia; The play of persons and forces outof which was to come the declaration of independence ~~was~~ was in full swing amid the sweltering heat and discomforts of of Philadelphia. Abigail was running the farm, attending to business, keeping John informed concerning all things political going on at home. Anxiously she waited news pondering on the great revolt they were contemplating. "Great things John had written here were on the tapis."



From the same household out of which already was emerging  
heresy in politics and religion, heresies in which Abigail s  
shared with John to the full limit both in understanding and  
support, there emerged this letter which I am about to quote.

" I long to hear that you have declared in independency.  
And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I sup-  
pose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire  
that you would remember the ladies and be more gener-  
ous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not  
put such unlimited power into the hands of the husb-  
bands . Remember, all men would be tyrants if they  
could. If particular care and attention is not paid  
to the ladies, we are determined to form a rebel-  
lion, and will not held ourselves bound by any laws  
in which we have not vvice or representation.



"That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute ; but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend.( John always addressed Abigail in letters as 'My dearest Friend') Why , then,not put it out of the power of the vicious and the lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity ? Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your sex ; regard us then as beings placed by providence under your protection,and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness. "

So far as I know that is among the first, as it is among the clearest and most forcefull statements of

-13- of the woman  
the woman question, or the feminist movement that has ever been  
made. In the century and a half since Abigail sent that letter  
on to John Adams in Philadelphia in 1776, hardly a thought has been  
uttered upon the whole subject that is not clearly stated and defi-  
nitely implied in that letter. Well that is the pin with its little  
red flad that Abigail the feminist drovw bwside the door step of  
the little house at Braintree from which she sent forth her husband  
to rebel, and from which she sent forth her oldest son to become  
President.

But John Adams reply to Abigail was not less interesting  
than the letter itself. to get the full flavor of it one must  
understand the intimate friendly humorous frankness that charac-  
terized their letters. One can almost see the smile on his face  
as he writes?-



"I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere ; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians , and negroes grew insolent to their masters. but your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment , but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out. Depend upon it we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force , you know ~~that~~ they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power in its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair and softly , and , in practise, you know we are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather

than give ~~this~~ up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight ; I am sure every good politician would plot as long as he would against despotism, empire, monarchy , aristocracy or oolocraey. A fine story indeed ! I begin to think the ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up tories , land-jobbers, trimmers. bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Irish Roman Catholics, Scotch Renegadoes, they have at last stimulated the (ladies) to demand new privileges and threaten to rebel."

How keen was John's insight into the significance and implications of Abigail's letter. ~~Just~~ I cannot take you with the interesting Abigail through all her years in England, at Washing-



ton , and then back home. She a strong character. "Thus ends royal authority in this State, and all the people shall say Amen" abigail wrote the day after the declaration had been celebrated. Her instructions for the dress in which she was to meet the ~~king~~ queen in England were characteristic? - Good quality and simple. The main thing that I have been interested to suggest ~~that~~ is that this tumultous chnage in domestic relations, the advent of woman intom industry, the experiments in moral conventions are all part the wear and tare , the tragidy , and at times the comidy involved in the change of base from royal authority, to codes and convictions in which women themselves shall have voice.

It was as natural and as inevitable that Abigail Adams or some other in whose veins the spirit of 76 flowed should have uttered these sentiments as that the colonies themselves should have voiced the spirit of freedom, ~~xxxx~~ and declared themselves free

from the mother country, and its background of European and oriental tradition, and that the same people should declare themselves free from the same foreign and royal theology. The germ of something new, ~~both~~ not only in government and religion, but also in social and domestic relations was emerging from the soil of experience in this new world. ~~It was not only in government and religion~~ So far as it touched upon the status of woman and domestic relations Abigail Adams, feminist, gave expression to is not only in the passage which I have read, but in a long, remarkable, and useful life.

Having in mind what we have seen evolving out of the past, for a moment let us turn out transit towards the unblazed wilderness through which we must pass on our human journey. What lies ahead ; what dangers ; what obstacles ; what signs of a primised land.



First having in mind both the declaration of Abigail, and the character of her domestic life, plus the tendencies that one may observe during the past ~~the~~ hundred and fifty years, I am venturing on the suggestion that she conceived of domestic life as based upon a companionship of man and woman equal before the law, each pledged to the other to share as each is naturally able in all the achievements and joys, the deffats and sorrows of life. "We will not be bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." That is a far cry from the primitive cobception of marriage, so recently set forth in the Papal encyclical. What is more I venture the suggestion that most of our turbulent domestic changes, the revolt of both men and women from unwise, hasty, and often somewhat sordid marriage contracts, as witnessed in the divorce court pro-ceedings,

on the one hand, and the often tragic efforts of adjustment on the other hand, are but part of the travail and stain in the process of our transition from the ~~exception~~ Oriental conception of marriage in which the woman is held as an obedient slave to the will of a master; to the conception of marriage which has been developing in our western world, ~~that~~ namely that it is a co-operative venture, a companionship of a man and a woman in all the relations of life.

If there is any meaning to history; if there is any meaning to the spirit of '76, which created a new nation, and a new interpretation of religion, ~~then~~ then we are destined to see increasingly in the future, as we are already witnessing in the present, a more complete ~~except~~ establishment of wholesome, faithful marriages in which man and woman share together in com



plete confidence , the common experiences, the common labors and joys of life.

Perhaps this is the point where one may ~~suggest~~ call attention to a present ~~exist~~ danger, and throw out a warning. The problem of a real adjustment in domestic life is not easy, and never has been. The undisciplined power of primitive and fundamental instincts is tremendous. Even in the most ideal consummations of married life there are difficulties of adjustment,-- the problem is not to escape the difficulties, but to meet them and surmount them honorably .

At the present time the most threatening danger to domestic relations , both in individual cases, and in society as a whole arises from the fact that industry has invaded the home and in all too many cases left the home quite barren of any

constructive and absorbing labor. This ~~increasing~~ has created a situation that is very difficult of adjustment. On the one hand it has sent many women into the industrial, commercial, and political world in search of an absorbing occupation. Some have found these activities permanently satisfying; others have found them the avenue through which they have entered in marriage relations,--sometimes passing through the tragic processes of the divorce courts; others have found these industrial careers but a blind alley, from which no satisfactory exit has been found. There are many tragedies here:

On the other hand this invasion of the home by industry has left many a married woman without a real occupation except that of killing time and ~~sex~~ making a business of pleasure seeking. If the pitiable condition of such women were not already



in the physicians office, in the courts of domestic relations; one would but have to turn to corrent literature, whether fiction or other to discover how remorseless and logical moral laws ~~are~~ are in their operation. It was inevitable that some one should point out as Mr. Bernard Shaw did a few days since that the place to find the woman who will make a companionable wife is not in the centuries of idleness and pleasure, but in offices and places of business where the common interests developed are much more permanent and of much deeper significance. To-day as in all ages the woman who permits herself to be the companion of a man only in his hours of pleasure and idleness can ~~nevertheless~~ but rarely hope to achieve the satisfactions of a real companionship. In spite of exceptions in individual cases, the main stream of human history is guided by and made up of those men and woman who carry the burden of the worlds work. Play, pleasure, hours



of idleness and relaxation derive their chief value from the fact that they are incidental to the day's work. The demand of our natures for constructive, creative, and significant activity is fundamental and in the long run very exacting. In the long run whether in wedlock or without the woman who becomes the companion of man in his idleness and pleasure, and who herself relies upon that companionship for her satisfactions, is indeed most pitiable and tragic.

In this whole complex problem of our day this, I am sure, is the most difficult. Instinctively right, I am sure also, is the tendency that ~~impels~~ impels girls to seek occupation rather than to idle in house devoid of constructive activities and interests. There are Abibails today as in 76 whose minds are keen, whose purposes are right, and whose courage is manifest.



From time to time I hear from the lips of those younger than I am suggestions of that wisdom, born of fidelity, integrity and candor such as Abigail had in marked degree. In the young about us there is still vital that ancient urge that has carried generation after generation through the turmoil of its time into a new and better era.

But just a suggestion of Abigail again for a closing picture. "milkmaid, housewife, successful farmer, weaver, teacher, wife, mother, and withal when conditions demanded she had taken her place beside the Ambassador to Great Britain, and a first lady of the land. " I believe I could gather corn and husk it; but I should make a poor figure at digging potatoes." said Abigail.

It was a hard life in some ways that Abigail had lived. ~~John Adams was a very hard worker~~ But there is some-



majestic in John and Abigail Adams celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, there is something deeply human and touching in the simplicity of their lives after the long years of arduous toil; the old farm house, rather the worse for wear; Abigail still mistress of the household; John puttering around the farm, reading, writing, visiting with the neighbors. There is a ~~picture~~ the picture of them standing on the porch of the old Stone church, after service visiting with the neighbors, inquiring ~~ask~~ for friends, for the absent and the sick; there is something ~~xxx~~ There is something genuinely royal in the picture of the old couple turning away from the neighbors to walk down the road to their home, to enter by the door from he had gone so many times on long journeys, and leaving the world behind ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to share in the companionship ~~of~~ age the joys and sorrows of



a real married life, an achievement in domestic friendliness  
and affection , kept holy through years of labor and toil.