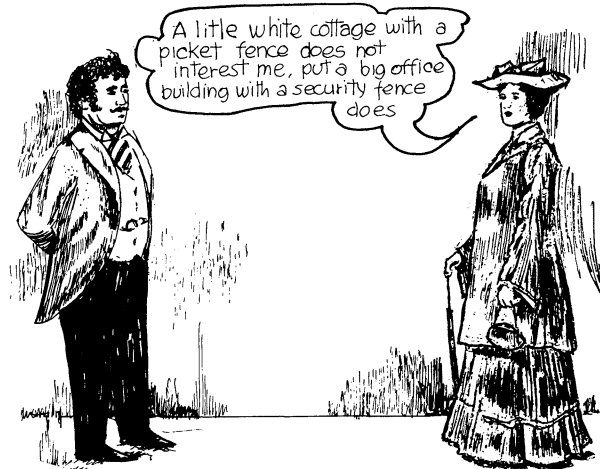


The Woman in Business

(1903)

Annie Merrill



Cet article, écrit en 1903, nous indique comment 'Une Femme d'affaires sérieuse' doit se comporter et quelles sont les avantages d'une carrière pour elle et pour son futur époux.

The Serious Woman in Business does not ask leniencies. She takes her work as a man should. She is punctual. She is tidy. She does not shirk the disagreeable work. She does not demand a boy to dust her desk. She acts promptly. She pockets her sensitiveness (there never was a woman made without it). She is courteous and respectful—without being servile; is not flippant; does not grumble, but is ever cheery; seals her lips tightly upon business secrets; closes her ears against the gossip of her co-workers; refuses to discuss her management with the fault-finder or disgruntled employee; defends her employer even though his methods seem all wrong; though she cannot read his motives, she trusts that they are wholly good.

The Serious Woman in Business works as conscientiously when left alone in the office as though the manager's keen eyes were upon her. She does not do 'fancy work' in the office. If she has any spare time she studies to improve herself along the lines of work in which she is engaged, thus making herself more valuable to her employer, and increasing her chances of advancement.

'What I like about that girl,' said the manager of a big concern to me the other day regarding a valued member of his staff, 'is the keen, eager interest she takes in all her work. Of course, many of our young ladies are faithful and conscientious, and may be painstaking enough, but this quality I speak of distinguishes Miss R—from all the others. In fact,' he added with enthusiasm, 'she is more like a bright, ambitious boy!'



"She is ever cheery"



"She takes her work as a man should"

And it seems that many a manager feels that the Woman in Business does not take her work seriously enough; that she is lacking in ambition; that very often her mind is on other things, and that she is entirely without that vital interest which is so necessary to have or acquire before she can become a valued member of any staff. Outside of the office the Serious Woman in Business takes life seriously. She has high aims. She commands respect by her demeanour on the street, and in her social circle, which, though it may not be a large nor a fashionable one, yet represents the world to her. She is careful to avoid being conspicuous in her manner. Dresses plainly. Does not try to ape the 'lady', with gaudy imitations in gowns and jewels. She keeps good hours. She takes care of her health that her work may not suffer. She avoids the 'pie and ice cream' lunch, that her digestion may not suffer.

This Serious Woman in Business will not allow men to squander money upon her, remembering the admonition of her good old grandmother, that such a course would be vulgar. She insists upon bearing her share of the expense when going out with her men friends, and the nice man will appreciate her position, amiably permitting her to feel a comfortable independence which to-day is making real comradeship among men and women such a delightful possibility. This independent plan—or the 'Dutch Treat' is a subtle compliment from a woman to a man; to the man, that is, who has sufficient discernment to read the signs correctly. It proves to him that she values his friendship and companionship for its own worth; that she is not accepting his attentions merely for the 'good time' he is able to give her, in the way that the mercenary girl makes use of 'many a generous-hearted and blindly-devoted man'.

Because this nice-minded Woman in Business insists upon such a course, it is not necessarily mannish. Instead, one of the most feminine women in town is a little stenographer of my acquaintance, who works eight hours a day in an office, pays her own way to the theatre where she is seen weekly (and never without a masculine escort) and always drops her little blue, or red, or white car-ticket in the conductor's box. An invalid mother is never without her weekly allowance from this same little lady—who is small in stature only.

Business is unlovely for a woman, and in many ways she were better out of it. It tends to make her cynical. It too often takes away her pretty superstitions, her sweet faith, her treasured beliefs regarding men. Her sunny disposition grows clouded, and where are her happy, careless, girlish little ways that so endeared her to her friends? They are gone—gone with her inability to keep her own expense account.

Business makes many a woman severe. It leads her to wear a false independence—the sort of independence in which a woman cloaks herself to hide her miserable loneliness, a bravado that the woman who is so unfortunate as to have no man friends, flaunts in the face of an envied sister, the quality of mind which could alone inspire the words heard from the lips of a 'lady' bookkeeper not long ago: 'Huh! I could get a position before a man any day.'

The fascinations of the constant excitement in a busy commercial life make the thought of house-keeping seem tame to the very young woman. Her immature judgment is not capable of giving correct values to the things of life. In common with the discontented 'domestic', who has left the goodly, if monotonous, kitchen, for the doubtful factory, she likes the regularity of business hours, remembering that at home her work seemed never really to end.

Every young woman who launches forth into the business career must meet many disagreeable things—if not in her own office, then in other places where the work makes it necessary for her to enter. She sometimes encounters rudeness, a lack of consideration, undesirable attention, and now and again, alas, a decided coarseness. But happily this is the exception, for the majority of men are nice to the woman who shows by her manner that she can appreciate and be grateful for a gentlemanly deference. When this is not granted to a woman it is not always the man's fault—be it confessed with shame. There are times, however, when the most careful woman finds it difficult to steer an even course among all classes and conditions of men, in order to avoid the accusation of prudishness on the one hand, and yet not invite that unwelcome familiarity which to-day breeds the same amount of contempt that it did when her grandmother was a girl.

Following natural impulses instilled in the home life, the young girl hurries to make friends with her desk neighbour. There is on both sides much enthusiasm, which dangerously approaches the vulgar state of 'gush'—and the inevitable end is a crash. This is sometimes the fault of an unwise man at the head of affairs. The most quarrelsome and badly conducted business house into which I was ever permitted a 'private view', was one where the manager welcomed each new employee with the well meant greeting 'We have no hard-and-fast rules here like you find in ordinary business concerns. We are more like one big family.'

Family, indeed! but like many a family among the tenements, a place where there was strife and discontented mutterings, and, not infrequently, open rebellion.

But, from another point of view, it might be well if every girl could have even a year's experience in the busy world of men. The wife or the daughter can never truly know all that a man's evening at home means to him until she has once actually slaved in the field of business. She can never guess how sacred is that time to him, when at the end of a weary, anxious, harassed and strife-filled day, he comes home, praying for rest and happiness there, unless she has worked and fought in the ranks, unless she has once felt the terrible strain that nearly every business career forces a man to endure. Shall the inexperienced woman be too severely blamed for dragging her faithful provider from his home night after night to the place of amusement or the social function, for her gratification? Believe me, she does not realize the crime she is committing.

And there are other arguments in favour of the business training for a woman. It broadens her mind. It makes her more averse to gossip. She is enabled to give a saner value to the things of life. She recognizes the attainments that are worth while striving after. She acquires the priceless value of order and punctuality. She learns to keep and guard a secret.

And yet, after all, does not every Woman in Business, in her own soul, feel—whatever she may admit with her lips—that the home life is the better life?