



South Dakota State Archives

“Thoughts of a Thoughtful Woman” - Della Robinson King

Women have not always had the right to vote. Suffrage was granted in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment when it was proclaimed, “The rights of citizens in the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States on account of sex.” Many women fought for suffrage long before 1920. Della Robinson King, editor of the South Dakota Messenger, was a prominent women’s suffragist from Scotland, South Dakota. The dedication page of King’s 1898 work, “Thoughts of a Thoughtful Woman,” reads: “To the noble women of South Dakota, working for liberty, with little money, with small encouragement. I dedicate this little book, trusting it will help.” Listed below are nine of the 47 thoughts Della Robinson King included in the work. While reading these thoughts, keep in mind the social forces working against women’s suffrage at the turn of the century.

Excerpts from “Thoughts of a Thoughtful Woman”

1 - If mothers could vote - the personal, live interest aroused from active voting would enable her to exert a more powerful influence on her sons and daughters. Then politics would enter into the family conversation as it has never done before.

2 - A few years ago when the advocates of Woman Suffrage chanced to be mentioned, a vision of a stern, headstrong, ancient maid came before the mind — hair cut short and straight as a graveyard, a severe masculine attire to set it off — sour because some man had not given her a chance to say, “Yes,” in consequence of which she had turned natural enemy to the disappointing sex! But today the vision has changed! Now we know the sweet mother face, the young girl’s fresh, earnest face and bright eyes, or our successful business woman’s gentle manners, come as a reality and a relief. No menacing, no repulsion, all as it should be in these progressive times.

4 - Many argue that the majority of women would not vote if they had enfranchisement. True, they might not vote ordinarily but if a great vital question should be the issue, then the average woman, who likes her ease, would rise to the occasion, and meet the issue with a practical power she has not today.

11 - It is said, if women have the same opportunity with men in all industries, that men will be forced out of employment. What did men do for employment when most of the manual industries were carried on in the home — such as spinning, carding and weaving, making hose and clothes, hats and bonnets, mittens and gloves, brewing and baking, pickling and preserving, making butter, cheese, candles, soap? All these industries are grown extensively from rudiments, both in quantity and quality. Cannot women share in work what they once did entirely? And ought not they receive the same pay for the same work?

18 - Do you men (fathers) expect, after your daughters have advanced, grade by grade, with your boys, in the public schools, reciting, writing, singing, debating — whatever their talents direct, you are going to keep them from these pursuits after they reach 18 and 20? If you could have kept them out of the schools (which you couldn't) you could have kept them "down in their places," but you never can now!

29 - There are women who do not desire to vote because they have no realization of living other than personal and social vanities; and there are other women who have read so much regarding the losing of their femininity and the respect of men, that they are afraid of desiring anything that will so harm them. Whose fault is it, after years of depression and ignorance, you find women today frivolous and vain, if today the individual woman does not grasp the meaning of liberty and apply it to herself. Who, I say, is to blame for this? The past has been an uneven struggle between the animal nature and the demands of the soul, now that the voice of the spirit grows stronger, women will stand out in great glory and sublimity.

32 - What is there to "unsex" a woman in going, in her own town, to her own district, where she is acquainted and honored, and quietly and gladly placing her ballot for a cause she has studied and believes is right?

39 - The foundation principles of the woman suffrage movement are: the recognition of individual rights and responsibilities, and that the duties of the individual must comprehend the family, the parish, and the great interest of the public. Whatsoever secures peace and purity in the home will secure the same conditions in the government.

44 - Ah, how we women would appreciate "the sacred power in our right hand;" how we would study to know how to use it; how we would pray to do right with it. And would we ever grow cold and indifferent? Not while there is love in a woman's heart, not while we lead the young. When the mother can appreciate the glow of liberty as she bends over the cradle, when the teacher can take the Constitution of this

Republic, and with lips trembling with patriotism, eyes shining with the love of liberty, and with a live interest she has not today, teach it to her pupils, then and not till then, will the young grow up to honor a country like ours. Surely the elevation of woman is the growth of the whole state, and whatever stress a Nation lays upon the advancement or degradation of its women, that stress is the plain proof of the Nation's uplift, or its pathetic life, its continuity or its downfall. When universal peace and charity alone can characterize the lofty ideals of liberty and equality, justice and purity, then there will be no pathetic plea for its women. If this Nation desires to lift itself above the inequalities and injustices of many of its institutions, let it take heed in time, to free its women.

Questions

Describe the two different “types” of suffragist explained in #2.

Name one of the arguments listed *against* women's suffrage. Is the point valid?

In #29, who would Della King say is to blame? Why?

In #44, what is the “sacred power in our right hand,” and why is it important?

In your opinion, who needed convincing of women's suffrage — men, women, or both? Explain.