

# ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIPS FOR WOMEN

Christine Ladd Franklin (1904)

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## ENDOWED PROFESSORSHIPS FOR WOMEN

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I have given the title "Endowed Professorships for Women" to the subject which I wish to bring before you today for the sake of simplicity, but I must premise that what I have in mind is not so much the regular full professorship in one of our larger colleges, but rather what the Germans have a good name for, a docentship -- a modest position, suitable for the beginner in college work, but one which offers the compensation that instead of being all work and no research, it gives to its holder a large amount of time in which to carry on the studies which he is himself interested in. It is these minor professorships which, as the next stage in the advancement of women, I wish to show the necessity for and the possibility of obtaining, not exceptionally, as is now the case, but in numbers proportional to the number of young women who are already fitted to hold them.

It is a comparatively new thing for women to have either the possibility or the desire to carry their studies so far as to meet the present requirements for the college professor. It is hard for us to realize -- so familiar a feature of modern life has the college girl become -- that it is only about forty years since it has been possible for women to obtain a college education, in anything like the proper sense of the term; and it is a still shorter time since such a *rara avis* as the doctor of philosophy first came into existence among women. But the world is moving rapidly in these days, as regards the affairs of the more modest sex, and it is now no inconsiderable number of women who have absolved the requirements of the highest rank of scholarship. At the same time there has been a great change in the demands of the colleges as regards the preparation required of their young professors. For many years, in the history of education in this country, nothing more than a diploma from some reputable college was essential to the obtaining of the position of assistant or instructor in an institution of corresponding rank, but that state of thing is now very nearly superseded, and the young person who wishes to enter upon the professorial career must have had something far more brilliant than this in the way of preparation. He must either have taken the degree of doctor of [p. 54] philosophy, or, if he has not actually obtained the degree, he must have carried out a course of study somewhat equivalent to what is required for that; to be a plain college graduate

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is no longer a sufficient foundation for the honors of the professor's life. Thus the existence of women who have secured for themselves the highest possible degree of training, coincides with the advent of greater stringency in the requirements for college appointments.

It is true that the same thing holds for men: where doctors of philosophy were once the exception, they are now the rule, and he who wishes to become a college professor is quite prepared to give three years to study after he has obtained his college diploma. But here the resemblance ends: the exacting positions are filled to too large an extent by the highly trained of one sex only; the women have not as yet been given a representation in proportion to their attainments. It is this discrepancy that we are anxious to see removed. It does not exist, I believe, to the same extent among the simple college graduates; they are more likely to be able to get positions as good as they are qualified for than are their more learned sisters. There is not so great a pressure for these positions on the part of young men, for men have other openings which are more lucrative, and women are as yet content, poor things, with very modest salaries. For instance, statistics of Barnard College, just issued, show that of the students graduated during its eleven years of existence, ten per cent of those who are teaching at all are teaching in colleges. This is a very satisfactory showing, as far as it goes, and it is doubtless representative of other colleges, but such college positions as this are for the most part those which involve a large amount of drudgery, and which afford very little time for the work of the investigator. It is the more highly trained who are most deserving of our sympathy. It is for them that we wish to secure -- by hothouse methods if necessary -- not the position of the overworked teacher in the smaller colleges but rather the minor professorships in the major universities, those which offer leisure at first, and, later, opportunity for advancement.

How great is the number of women who are fitted to hold professorships of this kind -- how large is the class in behalf of which I wish to arouse your sympathy? As far as it consists of young women who have studied in Europe, no statistics (as I am informed [p. 55] by officers of your Association) have as yet been collected, but it must be, I am convinced, no inconsiderable number. It is now some fifteen years since the Association of Collegiate Alumnae took up the task of sending young women to Europe to study at some great university, and it was not very much later that the Woman's Education Association of Boston joined them in this good work. You are all familiar with the statistics of what has been accomplished by these two organizations; our devoted chairman of the Fellowship Committee gives you each year a report on this subject which is of absorbing interest. I do not need to remind you at this time of its details. Our means have been painfully limited, and our results have not been anything startling as regards the number of women doctors of philosophy that we have produced, but ours has been the work of the pioneer, and it is a beginning that has been largely followed. There are already many colleges at which European fellowships are obtainable by clever girls. And in addition to the endowed study at foreign universities, there are now, of course, many young women who have the courage to use their own fortunes, or such sums as they can extract from parents who are no longer so obdurate as they were twenty years ago, in going to Europe for the three years' work necessary to the attaining of the doctorate.

But it is no longer necessary to cross the ocean in order to become a scholar of distinction -- a great change has taken place in the character of the training that can be obtained in this country. It is now a good many years ago that the Johns Hopkins University was very proud of the fact that a brilliant young student of physics, drawn by the fame of Professor Rowland, returned to Baltimore from the University of Berlin because he found that better advantages for his particular work were to be had at the American university. Since that time, half a dozen other universities have added vastly to their equipment for doing admirable work in the way of instruction in learning and in research, and there has been, correspondingly, a large addition to the number of students, both young men and young women, who are content to take their doctorate in this country. The actual number of young women who have had conferred upon them the degree of doctor of philosophy at institutions in this country, from 1894 to and including 1902, is 224. [p. 56] Prior to 1894 the statistics collected by the Bureau of Education do not give the number of such degrees conferred upon men and women separately, but the Commissioner of Education, Mr. Harris, has very courteously had examined for me the catalogues of the leading institutions from 1880 to 1894, and it appears that during that time the degree was conferred on not less than thirty-one women. This gives 255 as the entire number

of women who hold a doctorate from an American institution -- a number which I am sure you will find to be surprisingly large. It is evident that it is high time for us to consider seriously what steps can be taken to start these doctors of philosophy on the career which they long for and which is indeed their due.

For at present these clever women find no proper field for the exercise of their powers. A certain number of them, of course, end by marrying. I should not say that they *end* by marrying, for their marriage is very frequently of such a kind as to bring them into university circles, and to give them admirable opportunities for carrying on their studies. And where it is not of this kind, we may be well content that they are handing on their *good* qualities in the way of intellectual endowment to a new generation of still more admirably developed human beings. But not all of them marry and for those who do not, the natural sequel to their long years of hard labor should be to enter at once upon the assistant professorships in the colleges and universities. But here their troubles begin; it is only a very small number of the college positions that are open to them. For the young man who returns from Europe with his doctor's degree, and with the abstruse thesis which every one, clever or stupid, who studies at a German university is supposed to be able to turn out, the case is very different. Occasionally, it is true, by ill luck, he fails to find at once the opening that he is adapted to fitting into, but for the most part the colleges stand ready to seize upon these gifted beings the moment that they become full fledged (provided only they are of the right sex) and to put them into the first stage of that career which is to end, in course of time, in the full professorship. But for the women, the teaching positions that are at all worthy of their powers are few in number. The proportion of those who, after their brilliant preparation for the highest work, find that there is nothing in the world for them to do [p. 57] save the drudgery of teaching in the public schools is large, and is constantly becoming larger. Some, of course, find openings in the women's colleges, but the women's colleges are few in number, and it is not even desirable that all of the teachers in them should be women. For most, as far as consequences are concerned, the certificate of their doctorate is but an empty honor. It is related in my family that, when I was two years old, I was allowed one day to go to school. I had heard it said that school was a place to which one went in order to get one's education, and when the teacher gave me a little printed "reward of merit," such as the good children were in the habit of receiving in those days, I brought it home, and I said with the utmost satisfaction, "I went to school to get my education, *and I got it.*" That is the case with our clever girls -- they go to Germany and get the parchments, beautifully signed and sealed, that proclaim them to be doctors of philosophy, but no further consequences follow. They have nothing but the empty satisfaction of exhibiting their "tickets"; the pleasurable work and the adequate emoluments that ought to follow are not forthcoming. That they are not, is not due to any fundamental principle of nature which makes women incapable of filling such positions. The battle or, this point has already been fought out in most branches of activity, and settled on the side of fairness and of justice. The editors of reviews and the publishers of books do not ask, with reference to a given manuscript, "Is the author of it a woman?" but simply, "Is what she has to offer a thing of value?" All we ask is that the college positions (at least in the co-educational colleges) should be filled in this same dispassionate way, by doctors of philosophy *without regard to their sex*, or with very little regard to their sex -- with the understanding, say, that whenever the woman applicant for a position is distinctly *superior* to the man, she shall have the position. That this is not already the case is a residuum of prejudice on the part of the unfair sex which is certainly not destined to survive much longer. Can there be any doubt that if women were freely appointed to the docentships in the great universities, they would be successful in the function for which the docentship exists -- the carrying out of original investigations? Women do just as well as men in the work which leads to the doctor's thesis. It is a woman, Mrs. Lewis, who, in the face of great [p. 58] difficulty, discovered and photographed the earliest copy of a Gospel, what is now known as the Lewis palimpsest, and who has been given the degree of doctor of philosophy by the University of Halle in recognition of her achievement. No American man has ever done such important and profound work in mathematics as has the Russian woman, Kowalewsky. And certainly at this moment, when the whole world of science has been stirred to its depths by a woman, Madame Sklodowska-Curie, it is not the time to doubt that women can make discoveries! The discovery of radium is not only changing our views of nature, but, if it is given its full significance, it should deal a final blow to the belief that women can not do great things in science; from this one case it might be inferred, with far better logic than has been traditionally employed against our sex,

that women are quite as likely as men to make great discoveries -- indeed, that they are vastly more likely; for, out of the small number of women who have physical laboratories of their own, that one should make the great discovery of the time shows a far greater proportion of genius to opportunity than has ever been exhibited by men. It can never be predicted where the fire of genius will strike next. Just now it is a Spaniard, Ramon y Cajal, at whose feet the physiologists of the world are sitting. In the case of radium, the splendid laboratories of Germany and England and America have been passed by, and it is a Polish woman, and next to her, a Canadian man, to whom we must go to find out new things -- Madame Curie in France and Professor Rutherford in Montreal. Who knows when an American woman will be the one on whom the sacred fire alights? It is at least our duty to create for her the opportunity without which she will have been endowed with genius in vain.

It is evident that there is already a considerable number of women who are quite capable of filling the minor college professorships; that it would be greatly to the advantage of the world in general if they were doing the work for which they are fully fitted; and that for women themselves there would be an immense gain in the respect in which they are held, in the salaries which they can command, and the original work which they are in a position to produce, if it should become an understood thing that there is nothing strange or unusual in a woman's holding a college professorship. [p. 58]

That this is a part of the general course of development of the status of women, and that it is the step that is destined to be taken next, there can be no question. Is there not some means by which we can hasten its advent? We can not hope to get money enough to create professorships for women on any large scale, but measures need not be brilliant in order to be efficient. It is the first step which *counts*, as well as costs. A great deal is accomplished by very slender means when a given weight is used as a starting-load for overcoming friction; and by the simple opening of a single door, one can often, as in the case of Clerk-Maxwell's hypothetical demons, remove the obstacle which prevents the beginning of a new strong movement for which the time is ripe. It is just such a little push as this on the part of some beneficent intelligence -- in this instance not by demons but by our Association (or by one formed expressly for the purpose) -- that I wish to see exerted in behalf of the highly trained college woman. If we should simply found a few professorships, of such a nature as to attract attention on account of a special degree of distinction attached to them, it would go far to remove the prejudice which now exists against the idea of college professorships held by women. The plan that I have in mind is this: Instead of waiting for the colleges to offer professorships to our young doctors of philosophy, I would suggest that we offer our young doctors of philosophy as professors to the colleges -- and not in the way of founding fixed professorships in any given college, but rather of establishing what may be called peripatetic professorships, to be held, in any particular case, by our most available young woman and at the college or the university which shall best fulfil certain requirements of ours which I shall state in a moment. In the first place, the holder of this professorship would be, of course, the most brilliant young woman that we can find (among those doctors of philosophy who are not already satisfactorily provided for); we have already had much experience in the mechanism of finding a brilliant young woman, through the awarding of our European fellowship, and we know that the only difficulty is to make a proper choice among too many deserving applicants. In this case, the successful candidate should be one who has taken the doctor's degree with great distinction, and who has already given evidence of capacity for doing original work; she [p. 60] will be one who is eager for the opportunity to undertake further research, and who is fitted, by health, energy, experience and natural endowment, to carry it out. Her salary will be furnished by the association -- a modest one, but comparable with the salaries received in colleges by young men when entering upon the professor's career -- say a thousand dollars a year, until we are in a position to do something better. The appointment would be for one year, to be renewed at the discretion of the Association. But the important feature of the plan lies in the manner of selecting the college at which this brilliant young woman is to hold her professorship. The choice is to lie in her own hands, subject to the approval of the association which makes the award. The college chosen must be, of course, one in which she shall be allowed to give, each year, at least one brief course of lectures - it may be a longer or a shorter course, as circumstances shall decide; if it is a long one, she will constitute an efficient member of the college staff; if it is a short one, she will have all the more time for her own investigations. This

condition being satisfied, our young woman is to select the university where she can best pursue her chosen line of research -- the university, that is to say, which has the most distinguished and the most inspiring professors, and which also offers her the best laboratory (or other) facilities for the carrying on of her work.

Simple as this plan is, it will be found, I believe, to have several very important advantages. The secret of the brilliant work which it is the regular thing for the German professor to produce, throughout a long life, is the docentship with which his active life begins. Before he is tied down to the duties of the full professor, he is given once more a preliminary period of growth and development. For five to ten years, frequently, he gives only a very small number of lectures, and he lives in the midst of all the enthusiasms of a great university with almost unbroken leisure for carrying on his own studies and researches. It is this leisure, and opportunity, and freedom from care, that we wish to secure for the fortunate holder of our docentship. The university which she should select would appreciate the distinction which would lie in its being chosen as the best place in the country for carrying on the subject of chemistry, or physics, or physiology, or Greek, or whatever her special [p. 61] topic might be; and this would constitute a temptation to it to allow her to give her modest little course of lectures. Moreover, the university would at the same time be adding an assistant professor to its staff of instructors without being obliged to contribute anything toward his salary. There are not many universities in the country which are so highly endowed as to be insensible to this consideration. To select the chosen young women of the country, even though it be at first only a very few of them, and to tide them over the years that must elapse between their becoming mature enough and distinguished enough to be full professors; to prevent them from sinking into plain school teachers, and losing, in the treadmill of ceaseless duties, all their fresh interest in their work -- this is to do them an inestimable benefit. But, by far the most important of all, to create a few first-class women college professors who would not otherwise exist would be to make a distinct contribution toward the furthering of the rights and privileges of the sex in general.

CHRISTINE LADD FRANKLIN

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