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Presidents' Past + Future

~~Copy~~ To be returned —

Inaugural address of President Abigail Scott Duniway delivered at the opening session of the Woman's Club

Oct. 11, 1902

11 — During the six years of our existence as a Club, six ~~past~~ presidents have graced this Chair, each of whom has not only performed her public duties faithfully but has at the same time neglected none of those ~~higher~~ domestic obligations which it is always the aim of a good Club Woman to honor, as having their seat of usefulness within the home, which is and always must be the keystone to the arch of our highest public institutions. I suppose it is only natural that I should find myself today in a reminiscent mood. And, since some president of the future will, doubtless, write me up in her capacity of "present president," I now proceed to my self-imposed task, pausing only to add, in the words of a poet, "That mercy I to others show, that mercy show to me."

As I turn the search light of reminiscence through the receded years, I see the plump, comely and comfortable figure of our first president, a matronly, mild mannered, public spirited woman, wielding ~~who wielded~~ the gavel over an untaught, untried body of her peers, whom she controlled and led by such rare qualities of diplomacy and will as ~~such~~ are seldom combined in one individual. How much the masterly ~~skill~~ ~~honors of Mrs.~~ of Mrs. J. J. Card had to do for a number of years in moulding into shape ~~to~~ and cementing into a harmonious whole the different factors, factions and dispositions of undisciplined womanly will, brought together for the first time in a homogeneous body, some of us may never ~~know~~ know.

Mrs. Card's public duties were not confined to, nor did they begin with Women's Clubs. She had fairly earned the title of "Rose Queen" through her work in the Floral Section of The Horticultural Society before she became a Club Woman; and much of the advanced position

(2)

~~position~~ ~~the~~ in floriculture occupied by Portland today is the direct result of her pains-taking leadership in this the sweetest and most beautiful of all the fine arts of civilization.

Mrs. Card was the first Oregon delegate to a ~~great~~ biennial meeting of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs, before which she acquitted herself in a masterly manner; and, although some of her views on fundamental questions have not been shared by the majority of her constituents, as has been proved by subsequent developments, all of us may profit by the spirit of toleration she has always shown to other people's opinions when her own have been set ~~aside~~ aside within our ranks by a popular vote.

~~It now becomes my duty to speak with deep sorrow concerning the heavy hand of affliction under whose pressure this first of our beloved ex-presidents is suffering as I speak. Let the tender solicitude of her co-workers go out to her in this hour of tribulation; and let our united petitions ascend to Heaven in her behalf, asking for her a speedy deliverance from those bodily ailments that are today holding her in thrall as a prisoner of hope.~~

In our second President, Mrs. Levi Young, we were blest with a ~~dame~~ chief magistrate of ~~dignity~~ commanding presence, inflexible willpower, much parliamentary skill and devoted attention to duty. ~~Of medium hight, clear complexion and charming voice,~~ Mrs. Young led us with firm steps along the paths marked for us by her predecessor and carved for us higher niches in many of the by-paths that were opened ~~for us~~ as the work proceeded.

Mrs. Young attended the Biennial meeting of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in Denver in ~~1893~~ 1898, and came back to us from that august gathering, on the crest of the Rocky Mountains as ardent an Equal Suffragist as the Mayor of Denver, or the Governor of Colorado himself.

Idaho now claims ~~our second past president~~ Mrs. Young, she having been transferred from our midst to a high position in the ~~State~~ University of this State, and it is pertinet to this occasion to say that she now enjoys the higher position of an unfranchised citizen--a position which is yet to be bestowed upon the less fortunate members of the ~~Portland Oregon~~ Woman's Club of Portland, or any other ~~Women's~~ Woman Club of the state of Oregon, unless she follows Mrs. Young's example by moving into an enfranchised state within the next two years.

Of all our ~~past~~ presidents none has excelled in brilliancy, wit, wisdom and womanliness, our third incumbent, Mrs. Cleveland Rockwell, who was elected to the chief magistracy at a time when we had set sail upon a widening sea of divergent opinions, upon whose yeasty waves she poured the oil of harmony, ~~while~~ waving above us, ~~as with a wand of velvet, and with the other on the helm~~ which she guided our rocking craft to harbor with the skill of a veteran sea captain.

Mrs. Rockwell was the first woman in our Club to take a step toward the foundation of our present free library system. Although to Mrs. S.A. Evans belongs the honor of guiding the measure through the State Legislature, to Mrs. Rockwell is due the credit, as our third President, of first calling public attention to it's needs, ~~of~~ appointing the first Library committee, and has the honor of opening her parlors to it's first meetings.

Mrs. Rockwell is still our leader on many a ceremonious occasion. Busy as she is in philanthropies, charities and literature, and withal, a perfect home maker, ~~and one of the proudest of grandmothers (though she doesn't look forty) we bow to her in matters of etiquette and adornment, well knowing that we'll make no mistake in these things even obeying her mandates.~~

There now rises before my mental vision our fourth ~~pres.~~ president, Julia Bodley Comstock, a first class presiding officer, whose impartial rulings, distinct enunciation and womanly demeanor charmed us all. Non-assertive and yet firm, just and yet kind, she managed always to have her own way--according to her interpretation of the Constitution---, whether we thought it our way or not. A Buckeye by birth and a Web-foot by adoption, Mrs. Comstock soon graduated from school ma'am to matrimony, as is the habit of the crew, and for some years lived an ideal home, with her late lamented husband, J. J. Comstock, Esq., in a picturesque mountain valley in the Southern Oregon foothills, which still bears his honored name. In this mountain fastness, through which the Southern Pacific railway runs like a thread of illuminum, while below it trickles a busy stream like a ribbon of liquid silver, our Julia caught inspirations from nature, which she now distils for us in judicious doses from her pyrbs in the Oregonian tower, where she now yields a facile pen as associate editor of the Club Journal, a magazine of value to Club Women, which I hope you all patronize.

Our next chief magistrate was ~~our own, inimitable~~ Grace Watt Ross, a Shakesperian among ~~Shakesperian among~~ Shakesperians, a parliamentarian among parliamentarians, ~~and in everything else an originality on her own account. Strong minded as is our Grace in her individuality, she is rightly named as to her personallity: for in dress, manner, repartee, and even in sarcasm (of which she is a master) she is Grace itself. Filling the Chair with dignity, ruling with firmness and impartiality, always ready to back her opinions in a way of her own, or plume her fancies with the un-looked for and unexpected, this brilliant native daughter of Oregon, though not our president this year--the more's the pity, yet remains among us, an~~

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(5)

active member and an abiding joy. She is now the popular president of the civic federation of Women's Clubs, the first of our ~~past~~ presidents to achieve that honor.

My next and last, but by no means least in honor, is our amiable and accomplished sixth ~~past~~ president, Julia A. Marquam, the youngest of our historic sextet, ~~whose expiring incumbency was regretted by none more sincerely than myself~~.

~~Mrs. Marquam modestly imagines, as do all of her predecessors, that she has achieved nothing worthy of historic mention; but the fact remains that not one of these past presidents is a proper judge in this particular case, however faultless they may be in others.~~

~~While I am compelled by the time limit of our Calendar to deviate from my first intention to give a sort of biographical personal history of each of these my predecessors,~~ I am proud to say that Mrs. Marquam is ~~another~~ the second native daughter of Oregon to occupy the president's chair, and when her life-work is fully written, ~~up~~ ~~no year~~ of her beautiful existence will shine with more radiance than illumes the one she spent as our presiding officer. It ~~that~~ was during her incumbency that the famous Cooking School was formed, ~~which~~ as an integral part of our Club work, out of which has grown the Federated Association of Domestic Science, toward which the entire Pacific Northwest is now eagerly looking as one of the most important measures yet inaugurated by our Woman's Club; since the great problem of how to feed clothe and shelter our ~~human family~~ husbands, in the best and most approved and improved sanitary ways, is emphatically woman's work, and must be done by her if successfully done at all,

~~no matter what else she may undertake or accomplish, in any other channel whatsoever.~~

Now, what shall I say of our future presidents? If I were gifted with the spirit of prophecy I should portray them as occupying the Chair of authority in a commodious, well-appointed Club House of our own, where every every department of Club work may find a home adapted to it's needs, supported by a constituency of happy, healthy, contented wives, mothers and grandmothers, who have solved the problem of ~~a~~ successful home ~~life~~ building and are ready to spend the remainder of a happy existence, not in growing old in a corner, as their mothers and grandmothers did, thus feeling themselves "in the way" ~~in the corner~~ at the fire side, but keeping ~~themselves~~ their bodies young and their spirits happy and contented till their time shall come to hear the welcome call, "it is enough! come higher!" The Club President of the future will be known on her own account "in the gates, when she sitteth among the rulers of the land." It requires no spirit of prophecy to foretell ~~the~~ the inevitable.

Let it be our duty, as Club Women of the present, to lay aside all animosities, all personal ambitions and petty exhibitions of selfishness, forgetting in the infinite possibilities of the future the pettiness of the idols that sometimes now hold us. Thus by keeping our spirits sweet we will be able to emulate at all times the example of the "virtuous woman" of King Solomon's time, of whom he said, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness."

~~As~~ the retiring President of the Woman's Club of Portland, of which I have the honor of being the seventh, ~~who has occupied the chair~~, I come before you, with regret, as it's first Executive who has been the victim of a lingering and dangerous illness, that has seriously interfered with her duties. That I was compelled to hand over the banner of leadership to our Vice President, ~~to~~ now, happily your President-elect, was of course, a personal disappointment to me; but it was so much alleviated by her admirable administration of the Club's affairs, assisted as she was by her able coadjutors, the Board of Directors, each of whom is worthy of special commendation, that I can only say to the Club, ~~that~~ My loss was your gain.

My thoughts were with you daily as I lay at the point of death in a San Francisco hospital; and the cheering reports that reached me of your progress and prosperity must have acted as a tonic; for I bear in ~~all~~ sorrowful remembrance the fate of at least two prominent men of my acquaintance, who, taken with the same malady - an abscess in the ear - about the same time that I was stricken, died under the surgery that restored my health and hearing, and unfortunately consigned them to transition.

Of the little flurry in our ranks, which rumors reached me while disabled in a neighboring State,

I am happy to say that nothing came of it but ~~that~~ the opportunity it afforded our brethren, the news gatherers of the daily press to freshen their columns by a little fun at our expense — an experience of which I was for many years the only burden bearer.

As the reports of the Club's doings for the current year will be given in the proper place I need not enlarge upon them here. But I must speak, with love and tenderness, of our three departed members, Mrs. J. C. Card, Mrs. Rosa F. Burrell and Mrs. R. A. Miller, all of whom have stepped to the beyond within the year.

May the Oregon State flower bloom with the Oregon roses to their memory forever; and may it be our aim to emulate their virtues until it may be said of us at last, "It is enough; come higher".

While I much regretted my inability to brave the Oregon rains at the last moment, and so miss the annual meeting of the State Federation of Women's Clubs at Astoria during the week, I have been a deeply interested reader of the proceedings, and am most happy to have with us the leading representatives of the meeting for whose greetings I am glad to send my message aboard.