

My Future As I See It

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WHEN I wrote “The Story of My Life” I thought I had told my readers all I knew about myself. But since the publication of my book I have been asked what I am going to do after I graduate from Radcliffe this year. People often ask me what my future is as I see it. I do not intend to follow the example of the peasant girl in La Fontaine, who pictured such a bright future that in her enthusiasm she spilled her milk. Nor am I like the small boys who vie with each other in predicting what they will do when they grow up, and promise to be policemen, doctors, firemen, and soldiers.

I used to have all sorts of unrealizable ambitions. Indeed, the only one that has never troubled me is the ambition to be President of the United States. I suppose in youth we are all, as a matter of course, song-birds. The only question of importance which we have to decide is what kind of song-bird we shall be. As we grow older we smile at the eager soarings of our childhood. But I hope we shall never cease to dream out our world, to people it with gods strong of hand and great of soul. I certainly hope I shall never think of the world as the pessimist thinks of it—a commonplace thing shaped like an orange, slightly flattened at the ends!

The only real ambitions spring from the circumstances in which our lives are set. I used to believe that my limitations would prevent me from doing anything beyond improving my mind and accepting the cup of pleasure or sorrow in whatever measure it might be dealt to me. There is no grief deeper than the consciousness that we are isolated, no ache of heart harder to bear than the thought that our fellows are crying in the darkness, and we are so fettered that we may not go to them. This is separation from the social order into which we are born, the agony of thwarted forces, a death in the midst of life. But I have discovered that the material with which we work is everywhere and in abundance. I have felt the joy of the strong man who grasps the reins in his hands and drives the forces that would master him. Our worst foes are not belligerent

circumstances, but wavering spirits. As a man thinketh, so is he. The field in which I may work is narrow, but it stretches before me limitless. I am like the philosopher whose garden was small but reached up to the stars.

The occupations I can engage in are few, but into each one I can throw my whole strength. Opportunities to be of service to others offer themselves constantly, and every day, every hour, calls even on me for a timely word or action. It bewilders me to think of the countless tasks that may be mine. I am near the end of my last year at college. I am already looking forward to Commencement Day. In imagination I have passed my last examinations, I have written my last thesis, I have said good-by to my school-days, and taken my little canoe and ventured out on unknown seas. I have received the best education my country can give me. Generous friends have assisted me and strewn my path with opportunities. The question now is, What shall I do with this education and these opportunities?

I shall not forget the continuous task which my friends keep before me of improving my mind. I shall try to keep my flower-beds well trimmed and perhaps I may add to my estate. I shall read as extensively as possible and, perhaps, increase my knowledge of the classics. I shall never lose my interest in history and social questions, and I shall continue the studies that please me most as long as I live.

I am much interested in work that woman may do in the world. It is a fine thing to be an American, it is a splendid thing to be an American woman. Never in the history of the world has woman held a position of such dignity, honor, and usefulness as here and now. We read how nation after nation has reached a certain height of civilization and failed because the women of the nation remained uncivilized. I think the degree of a nation's civilization may be measured by the degree of enlightenment of its women. So I shall study the economic questions relating to woman and do my best to further her advancement; for God and His world are for everybody.

Above all must I interest myself in affairs which concern the

deaf and the blind. Their needs have given me another motive for traveling. I used to idle away hours in dreams of sailing on the Rhine, climbing the Alps, and wandering amid the monuments of Greece and Rome. Every tale I read about travelers, every description that friends gave me of their experiences abroad, and especially my visit to the World's Fair at Chicago, added fire to my longing. But now I have another ambition which transcends those imagined pleasures. Travel would, it seems to me, afford valuable opportunities to act as a sort of emissary from the teachers in this country to those of Europe, and to carry a message of encouragement to those who, in face of popular prejudice and indifference, as in Italy and Sweden, are struggling to teach the blind and give them means of self-support.

There are two ways in which we may work: with our own hands and through our fellow men. Both ways are open to me. With my own hands and voice I can teach; perhaps I can write. Through others I can do good by speaking in favor of beneficent work and by speaking against what seems to me wrong.

I often think I shall live in the country and take into my home a deaf child and teach him as Miss Sullivan has taught me. For years I have observed the details of her method, and her example in word and deed has inspired me so that I feel that I could impart to a child afflicted like myself the power to see with the soul and understand with the heart. All his needs and difficulties would be intelligible to me, since I know the darkness he sees and the stillness he hears. The road he must travel I have traveled; I know where the rough places are and how to help him over them. This would be the directest and most joyous way of doing for another what has been done for me.

Whether I teach or not, I shall write. My subject-matter is limited. I have very little that is novel or entertaining to tell those who see and hear, who have a vision that embraces earth and sky and water, whereas I grasp only so much of the world as I can hold in my hand. But I may perhaps translate from the classics and from the modern languages.

If opportunity offers, I shall certainly write on topics connected with the deaf and the blind. If I see a plan on foot to place the blind in positions of self-support, I will advocate it. If there is a good cause that needs a word, I will speak it if I can. If an institution is projected for the relief of suffering, and money is needed, I will write a timely appeal. Editors and publishers have already suggested subjects on which I might write, and I find their proposals helpful because they afford a clue to what others expect of me, and indicate the various ways in which I may increase and apply what literary skill I may have. I cannot say, however, to what extent I shall follow those suggestions.

Another way in which I may render service to others with my own hands is to take up settlement work. I suppose, as a friend said, I was fighting with windmills when I said in my story that it seemed wicked that the poor could not live in comfortable homes and grow strong and beautiful. But I hear every day of young girls who leave their homes and pleasures to dwell among the poor and brighten and dignify their lives, and the impulse within me to follow their example seems at times too strong for me to restrain. The world is full of suffering, it is true, but full, also, of the overcoming of it. As I reflect on the enormous amount of good work that is left undone, I cannot but say a word and look my disapproval when I hear that my country is spending millions upon millions of dollars for war and war engines—more, I have heard, than twice as much as the entire public-school system of the United States costs us.

I could help take care of the sick. I have several times had occasion to use my hands to lessen pain, as they do in massage. I may study this art by-and-by, and even if I do not become a masseuse I shall be interested in it as an employment for the blind. Our hands are instruments with which to gain a livelihood, and if they are trained to the best advantage they prove more precious than the eye or the ear. Massage is an occupation in which I or any blind person may use the hands with profit and pleasure and bring comfort to many.

No work, however, can mean so much to me as what I can

do for the deaf and the blind. I am not competent now to discuss their problems, but I shall find out what those problems are and study the methods of solving them. Whatever I do I shall keep track of all the measures proposed in behalf of the deaf and the blind, and to the best of my ability support the most efficient. I realize how much has already been done toward improving the condition of the blind and the deaf, and I am grateful; but there still remains much to be done; do what we may, we fall short and leave the work incomplete. I have twice had my share in the promotion of enterprises for the relief of the defective classes.

Last winter there was a bill before the Legislature of Massachusetts to provide the blind with manual training which would enable them to earn their bread, and I was asked to speak for the bill. Again, last May I attended the dedication of the new building of the Eye and Ear Infirmary in New York, and at the request of the physicians I spoke in behalf of the hospital. If these workers and philanthropists in Massachusetts and New York thought that I, a student in college, could help hundreds of unfortunate men and women, how much greater must my chances of usefulness be when I comprehend more fully the needs of the deaf and the blind! These experiences promise others, and I must follow where the good cause leads, just as the lamp goes with the hand.

Among the problems of the blind are two to which I shall direct my attention—more books for the blind and a universal system of raised print. My views may be erroneous, and I suggest them here merely to illustrate the kind of work which lies before me.

I should like the blind in America to have a magazine of high quality and varied interest like the best periodicals published for those who see. To establish one would require much money, and the blind are poor. If they are to have a periodical, some generous friend must establish it for them. In a country where so much is done to build great libraries and provide books for those who see, I should think a Mr. Carnegie might be found who would give a magazine to us who cannot see.

I am still a college girl, and I can look forward to a golden age when all my plans shall have been realized. I can dream of that happy country of the future where no man will live at his ease while another suffers; then, indeed, shall the blind see and the deaf hear.