

IT IS NOT A MATTER OF SEX—

Mary Kenney O'Sullivan

WOMEN are individuals as well as men, and they possess individual talents, energies and capabilities as well as men. It is on the face of it absurd to assume that because one half of the human race are women they must all do the same thing. Some women are good cooks, and so are some men. Some women are good managers, and so are some men. Some women are good wives and some men good husbands, and so on all through life.

In the industrial world woman is comparatively a new factor, where man for centuries has held sway—and she has not yet adjusted her new life to her accustomed domestic habits. She often takes a job as a makeshift until she shall marry, and she is irresponsible in the way she does it and the pay she demands for it. But though she is in this respect a greater sinner than brother man, he is not guiltless, and he has not her centuries of dependence behind him in excuse for his shiftlessness.

There is something of degradation in the idea of dependence, and much nobility in the idea of service. The individual woman who is able to see life from this standpoint and to make her work a service is, in my opinion, a success and an equal with the man who sees life from the same standpoint. When men and women live by high standards of truth, justice and righteousness they will realize the highest ideals possible to the individual, be that individual man or woman.

In the past month I have witnessed two incidents worthy of note, two women in responsible positions as clerks in exchange departments, where both tact and judgment are necessary. One was in one of our largest department stores and the other in a very small store. The young woman in the small store was agreeable and seemed to have the capacity of making the customers believe she was anxious to oblige them. As I watched her send one customer away after another, all smiling, I thought what a world some individuals can create.

The other woman was entirely the reverse. With still larger responsibilities, she showed her authority in a way that was most trying. I have known men in business of the same types as these women. It was not sex that determined their attitude toward their work, but their individuality.

The more I know of life in its daily routine the more I am convinced that the highest ideals possible are not reached by any sex or class, but by high standards of truth and equity within the individual. Only men and women who have high standards to the very depths of their being will find equality and nobility in the idea of service. With these standards man will develop the best possibilities of his manhood and woman the best possibilities of her womanhood; possibilities different in kind, but alike in excellence and alike in helpfulness.

