



PROJECT MUSE®

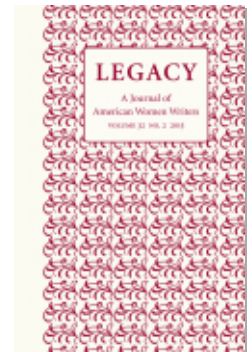
The New Woman

Barbara E. Pope

Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers, Volume 32, Number 2,
2015, pp. 298-304 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5250/legacy.32.2.0298>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/605013>

The New Woman

BY BARBARA E. POPE

Waverley Magazine, 18 July 1896

Margaret Hartwell was beautiful. Everybody admitted that. She was intelligent, industrious and amiable. Her husband loved her and was proud of her; but he found, rather to his dismay, that the little peculiarities which had amused him in the days of his short courtship, and which had occasionally called forth a hearty laugh while on the wedding tour, were not mere girlish whims and fancies. They were the straws which indicate the true direction of the wind.

Margaret was refined and gentle. She had virtues enough for two or three women; but she was a daughter of Wyoming, and Frank Hartwell was forced to acknowledge that his lovely wife had deeply imbibed the social and political heresy of her native State. She not only believed in the emancipation of women, but she had evidently been accustomed to a full measure of freedom, which she intended still to enjoy.

It was not Frank Hartwell's desire to become the lord and master of his wife; but he did expect her to lean on him somewhat. Woman in his opinion was a very high order of being; but she was too delicately constructed, morally and physically, for general usefulness. Her fields were the home and church; and even in those sacred enclosures she needed the support and protection of him for whose happiness she was created.

Housekeeping had been started on a scale suitable to a couple in moderate circumstances, and Margaret had shown excellent judgment in the selection of their one servant, who, after furnishing the usual references, had been carefully examined as to her knowledge of housework.

"Lucinda does not belong to the ignorant class of women who hire out before they have fitted themselves for any employment," said the young mistress to her husband, as they arose from the dinner table. "She understands cooking, washing and ironing—has learned them as a carpenter masters his trade."

"Speaking of the carpenter reminds me of the kitchen window shutters," said Frank; "has Jenkins been here?"

"He sent word that he wouldn't come before next week, so I bought the screws and hinges and hung the shutters myself."

Margaret was leaning against the sideboard. In stature she was barely

medium, but her form was exquisitely moulded, and she was remarkably graceful. A European might have been puzzled as to her nationality; not because of the tiny mouth with its dainty curves, nor the nose, whose contours deviated from the purely Grecian only enough to impart brightness of expression. Her complexion was brownish yellow, with skin soft and clear; she had large black eyes shaded by the longest and silkiest lashes; her hair was black and glossy as the raven tresses of the Mongolian, but finer in texture, and possessed of that much coveted quality, a slight waviness; she wore a pale cream house gown of soft material, the bodice tastefully trimmed with dark red velvet and chiffon.

"Did you say that you hung the shutters, Margaret?" asked Frank.

"Yes, I thought it unsafe to be longer without them."

"Who instructed you in carpentry?" he asked, when he had returned from an inspection of the work.

"There is a manual training department in our schools, and Albert and I took a course in the various branches. We both intended to study professions, but every civilized person should know how to be handy about a house."

"Did you and Albert learn the same branches, may I ask?"

"We went through the entire department. Albert won first prize for cake-making, but I beat him in the metal shop."

"Would it not have been proper for you to confine yourselves within certain limits—the one to the feminine and the other to the masculine portion?"

"I beg your pardon, Frank. We did not regard labor as masculine and feminine. Albert is larger and stronger than I, but we both have human facilities."

"Hereafter, my dear," said Mr. Hartwell, taking one of her pretty dimpled hands in his, "you must leave the men's part to me. I don't want you to injure your health and make yourself coarse."

"The bargain was that you would practice law and I take charge of the home; but neither of us must be selfish, and each will call on the other for assistance when needed," replied Margaret, smiling sweetly.

From the dining-room the husband and wife went to the parlor, where an hour or more was spent at the piano playing and singing; then they passed into the library, and Frank read aloud while Margaret sat by his side and knitted a lace centre-piece for the table.

"How easily your fingers go through those intricate movements," said Frank, closing his book. "What is the art? Crocheting?"

"Knitting. It is very easy. Wouldn't you like to learn?" asked Margaret.

"Have you forgotten the penwiper?"

He had admired a penwiper which she was making, and expressed a wish to have one like it. She gave him some of the cloth and explained the pattern, but finding that he could not even cut the parts, and failing in the attempt to teach

him, she took the scissors out of his hand with a look of commiseration that caused him to be nearly convulsed with laughter.

"Never mind the penwiper. I will begin with something easy. Now look. Can't you see how I put this loop on the needle?"

"The manipulation of the needles is the stumbling block. My fingers were not fashioned for such work, my dear. They are too clumsy," said Frank, his handsome face turning red in his struggle to maintain his gravity.

"Your fingers were made for all good uses to which you may choose to put them. They lack training, that is all. Take the needles. I will show you how to use them."

To humor her he took them, but the laugh would come, and he put the slender pieces of steel down with a shake of the head.

"Very well. You prefer, I see, to go through life with your powers of body and mind partially developed," was the gently administered rebuke.

"Come, Margaret, be reasonable," he pleaded, becoming grave. "Don't you know, my little woman, that such occupations would make me weak and effeminate?"

"Is my brother weak and effeminate?"

"Who? Albert Manning? Oh, no!"

"I can do nothing that he cannot do as well."

"It must be some magic effect of climate, then, that preserves his manhood. You can't try this sort of thing in this section of the country."

The next morning conversation turned to business for the day.

"I fear I shall grow lazy," said Margaret. "I have too much leisure."

"Don't you know how to kill time?" replied Frank. "Visit your friends. Go shopping, read, take naps. You are not to work all day long. It would wear you out."

"No danger. I shall always have my hours for rest and recreation. But I will go shopping only when I want to purchase, and will visit only when you can enjoy the pleasure with me. I have been thinking of perfecting myself in music for the purpose of giving lessons."

"There is no necessity for your teaching, but I would like to have you cultivate your talent for music."

"The professor is out of town at present. What do you intend to do at the office to-day?"

"I have a case in court at one o'clock," answered Frank, reaching for his hat.

"Don't you want a clerk?"

"The young man who is reading law with us will assist me."

"Wouldn't you rather have me come down and clerk for you?"

"What! Go into court with me?"

"Why not, Frank? Didn't I tell you that law was to be my profession, and that I worked in father's office for a year? I had been keeping house about ten months when you met me, because mother was obliged to take Jennie travelling for her health. Albert had begun the practice of medicine, and, being younger, I consented to stay at home."

"Did your father allow you to go into court?"

"I accompanied him to every trial."

"Did he confine himself that year to select cases?"

"No; he simply observed his rule not to claim innocence for those whom he believed guilty."

"The court room is seldom a fit place for a woman, Margaret," said Frank, smoothing back the hair from her broad brow.

"The details of crime and vice shock and disgust all good people, especially the young; but one cannot afford to run away from everything distasteful. Your practice is similar to father's. Don't you attend the trials?"

"You must remember that I am a man."

"But you are as pure-minded as I am, are you not?" she inquired, looking up earnestly into his face.

"I have endeavored to keep my thoughts as pure as those of my kind can be. There is a difference, you know, Margaret, in our spiritual natures."

"What caused the difference? Is it a matter of schooling?"

"Good-by, dearest."

He kissed her, as he always did when they parted.

Although, as directress of domestic affairs, Margaret had assumed control of everything pertaining to their establishment, from the orderly keeping of house and grounds to the buying of provisions and the preparation of food, Frank's taste was consulted and his comfort duly considered. If he took upon himself the performance of any of her duties she graciously accepted the aid rendered, and ever failed to thank him for it.

His darning and mending—well, she repaired his garments out of compassion for his ignorance of needlework; and her tender regard for him was further manifested by the trouble she took to have his easy-chair and slippers in a convenient place when he came home tired from office or court. The money which he earned she looked upon as joint property; and, strange to relate, while bent upon changing many of her absurd views, Frank could not find it in his heart to deny her free access to the family purse. It was fortunate that she understood the value and the proper use of dollars and cents.

There was another departure from established custom with which Frank's chivalry prompted him to comply. When, on a holiday, the hired girl was excused from her duties, Margaret, in her artless way, would divide the house-

work remaining to be done, offering to her husband, because of his superior strength, that portion which required the greater exertion.

The two members of the firm of Hartwell and Wilcox were on the point of leaving for their respective homes one afternoon in November, when Mrs. Hartwell came in. She had called for Frank, and was very attractive in her costume of seal brown, with a stock collar of bright colored Dresden ribbon, and scarlet poppies clustered against her black hair under the brim of the stylish felt hat. Her advanced ideas did not include bloomers; and she rejected the prevailing fashions only when they interfered with health or comfort.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Hartwell. I had the pleasure of seeing you in court this morning," said Mr. Wilcox.

"Yes. I wanted to observe your Eastern methods."

"Did you come down on your wheel, Margaret?" Frank broke in, in a rather hard tone.

"No; I remembered that yours is in the shop, so I rode on the cars."

"I am glad you take interest in our profession, Mrs. Hartwell," said Mr. Wilcox, politely, as he mounted his bicycle at the office door. "I hope on some future occasion to learn what you think of law as practiced in this part of the country."

Margaret made some suitable answer, and glanced at Frank, as if surprised by his cold manner. As he did not appear to be inclined to talk, she too kept silence. They went home in the street car. It was crowded, and when a feeble old man came in, and no one offered him a seat, Margaret promptly arose and gave him hers. Then Frank rose also, and requested her to sit down. She was not in the least fatigued, while he appeared tired and worried; so in a charming manner she thanked him, and made known her determination to stand. Some one tittered, and Frank bit his lip and went out on the platform.

While walking from the car to their house, the Hartwells were overtaken by Mrs. Wells, a neighbor.

"I saw you painting this morning, Mrs. Hartwell, and I wanted to come over; but baby was so fretful that I couldn't get away from him," said Mrs. Wells.

"I was finishing your work," was Margaret's explanation to Frank.

He had been painting the iron railing of the front stoop; and her words meant that she had exposed herself to public gaze while engaged in unfeminine employment.

"I have an old-fashioned rocking-chair which would be lovely painted white. Would you mind showing me how to do it?" asked Mrs. Wells.

"Certainly not," answered Margaret. "Aren't you my pupil?"

"Mrs. Hartwell has taught me to harness our horse, and now I can drive without troubling anybody. You don't know how independent I feel," said Mrs. Wells to Frank.

"Is Mr. Wells pleased with your new accomplishments?" was his query.

"He used to be a dreadful foggy; but Mrs. Hartwell does things so gracefully that she has overcome his prejudices. He says imitating her will do me no harm; and what do you think he has promised us for Christmas gifts? Picks and shovels!"

The easy-chair and slippers looked very tempting in the library, where a wood fire was blazing on the tiled hearth. It was a cozy room, with rugs and cushions and shaded lamps. Books of various kinds filled the bookcases, and engravings of noted places and of historical scenes were here and there on the walls. A table, supporting a small vase of cut flowers, a lamp, and the latest periodicals, had been drawn up close to the big arm-chair; and on this table Frank Hartwell placed his evening paper, walked slowly up-stairs to the room in which his wife was removing her wraps, entered, and closed the door.

He had patiently borne with her foibles, waiting for the improvement which he hoped would be produced by change of environment. Familiarity with her surroundings, however, had only served to remove restraint; her visit to the court-room was the last straw, and he felt it incumbent upon him to exercise a husband's authority.

He began by explaining to the young wife the difference between true and false theories; he pointed out the errors in which she had been reared; and, when he had said what should have been enough to convince her that her judgment was defective, he told her, kindly but plainly, that she must submit to his guidance.

"I regret that there is a disagreement between us," said Margaret. "Were you and I the only persons concerned, my affection for you, and my desire for peace and harmony, would cause me to yield. But even in our love for each other, we must be careful to do nothing that will retard the progress of civilization. We should not forget that the future happiness of the human race depends largely upon the physical and intellectual development of women—"

"I will make a list, after dinner, of the public places which you may visit and of those to which I cannot permit you to go. I will set down, too, what you must henceforth consider your legitimate occupations," said Frank, his face pale and determined.

"You forget, dear, that although you are four years my senior, I am twenty-three. If you have no objection, we will go to dinner. May I pin this rosebud on your coat?"

It was useless to oppose her. She clung to her tenets with a tenacity that no argument could weaken. Firm in her convictions, she went steadily on, and of course Frank could not resort to harsh measures. Despite her foibles she was a charming woman, and an affectionate one. If coldness came between them

both were unhappy. So Frank eventually ceased to contend, and settled down to the enjoyment of all that was agreeable in the companionship.

In the end, this proved to be a wise course. Margaret, appreciating his forbearance, began to yield to him in small ways, and no longer made herself conspicuous in public. Little by little each left the disputed ground to advance toward a common platform on which they may one day stand in perfect harmony. Meanwhile, Frank declares he has a most accomplished wife, and Margaret declares that he is fast becoming as delightful a comrade as her brother Albert.

