

SARAH S. PLATT DECKER LEADER IN WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

Character Sketch of a Woman Who is Officially Listed in Her Home Town as "Doing Nothing" and Yet Has More Activity Than the Average Man Would Care to Assume as His Share of World's Work

OMAHA is to have as its guest this week one of the most distinguished of American women—Mrs. Sarah S. Platt Decker of Denver. After this simple address might be written a long list of titles and offices she has and still holds bearing testimony to the justice of her claim to the distinction that is hers, but just now the women of the land like best to speak of her as "Mrs. Decker, president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs."

To tell who Mrs. Decker is would be almost superfluous, while what she is could scarcely be better expressed than it was by one of the papers of her home city: "A woman who stands for all that is progressive, all that is good and all that is womanly." A compliment indeed.

This will not be Mrs. Decker's first visit to Omaha. She has been here several times before in the capacity of club woman, but this time she comes also as one of the chief speakers before the Conference of Charities and Corrections this afternoon and Monday, as well as the guest of the club women of Omaha and of the Second district of the Nebraska Federation, which convenes here this week in conjunction with the conference.

Wherever the woman's club is known, wherever charities and corrections, child and woman labor reform, civil service reform or juvenile court work are known in this country Mrs. Decker's name is a household word. For years these several interests and others have had her sympathy and support and it has been a support that has given them impetus. Despite her varied interests and activities, however, Mrs. Decker can in no sense be classed with those persons who "belong" to things just because they are popular or profitable. Membership to her means responsibility and it is an axiom in her city and state that when Mrs. Decker takes hold there is something doing.

Fine Example of Woman

Mrs. Decker is a conspicuous example of the possibilities of the woman of wealth and social position who chooses to take a serious part in the serious work of the world. There are few men or women upon whom are made heavier demands of a public or private nature, but she is peculiarly as well as fortunately fitted to meet these demands. A woman of more than ordinary wealth, she has in addition the culture and the education that combined with a brilliant mind and exceptional executive ability enable her to take a prominent part in whatever may enlist her interest. And to all of this nature has added a robust constitution, without which she could have compassed but a fraction of the heavy work she has carried for years. And then there is a personality that never fails to attract all who come within its range. Strength, big heartedness, wide sympathy and a never failing humor make up a combination that is irresistible and that is an important factor in her capacity for leadership.

A native of Vermont, she was reared in one of those sturdy New England homes where character was placed above accomplishments, but where education and culture were appreciated for their full value. She is not a college bred woman, but she has made the most of her exceptional talents and the result is an education broad and practical. Combined with her eastern rearing, she has that progressive, energetic alertness that is characteristic of the westerner and that has resulted from her years of residence in Denver. And in this matter of nativity and residence Mrs. Decker has enjoyed another advantage. There is a tradition that, independent of its justice, is widely prevalent, that the easterner is reluctant at least to concede that his equal in culture and education can come from the west. This feeling has been more noticeable among women perhaps than among men, and because of her sympathy and understanding of both sections Mrs. Decker has been free from this handicap and the friction incidental to it. An eastern woman by birth and a western woman by adoption, she has done more than almost any other one person in bringing about a better understanding and closer sympathy between the women of the east and the women of the west in the General Federation of Women's Clubs. So loyally and so truly does she stand for both that her closest friends claim her heart is as much in one place as the other.

Orator and Parliamentarian

In spite of the numerous and varied revelations that have developed with the new woman the public is still disposed to evince surprise that there may be orators among them. Some one had defined an orator as one who has something to say and knows how to say it. This is true of Mrs. Decker. And more, she is recognized among the most gifted speakers before the public today. Forceful and convincing in personality, she has ready wit, a fund of good stories and a sense of humor that serve to strengthen her logic and to soften the plain truths she tells. She has a fluent and rare command of language and a magnetism that sways her audience and holds it, too, even beyond the range of her strong voice. Repeatedly Mrs. Decker has held congregations of thousands while she has presented the cause of some reform and the smiles and tears have succeeded each other alternately upon the faces of her auditors. Wherever she speaks, whether it be an educational, industrial or some session in the interest of reform, she is a "drawing card." As a presiding officer she has few equals. A skilled parliamentarian, she also has that other essential, especially in gatherings of women, of inspiring the timid ones as well as holding the attention of all. This ability she repeatedly demonstrated before the immense audiences that attended all the sessions of the biennial convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs held at St. Paul in June, 1906. They were audiences of thinking men and women; picked representatives of every state in the union, with generous delegations from Canada and abroad also. What the physical strain of those seven days must have been no one in the house or even in the "press boxes" at the foot of the rostrum could guess. There was no indication of weariness or impatience, as she presided through the full and frequently perplexing morning and evening sessions of every day. And Mrs. Decker has never committed herself unless it was in a brief report she made after the meeting in which she said: "And it is wonderful audiences! When the message reached the desk that first night that there were 6,000 people in the hall and that 2,000 more had been turned away—and one policeman mashed flat—the disposition of the presiding officer was to send for a return ticket and leave on the midnight train. The very thought of facing such a multitude for seven days was appalling even to the stoutest heart." But if Mrs. Decker was appalled no one guessed it, and the local papers marveled at such a convention of women.

Mrs. Decker's Occupation

But it has not always been clear sailing for Mrs. Decker. However, she refuses to be disturbed because women and their work are not taken more seriously by men. She is an optimist by nature and besides that experience has only served to strengthen her confidence in an ultimate satisfactory adjustment of things. She is a rare story teller and nothing can better portray the situation as she has found it than the following which she tells of herself. Her name had been attached to a petition to the city council of Denver, but she had failed to indicate her occupation. Upon this point a man was sent to her home to inquire.

"What is your occupation, madam?" he inquired.
"I am a housekeeper, sir," I replied confidently and proudly," relates Mrs. Decker.
"Well, that doesn't count," replied the man promptly.
"Well, I am both father and mother to my family," I announced.
"That doesn't count neither," he replied firmly.
"Well, I transact all my own business," she said briskly. "I collect my own rents and manage all my own affairs." (Mrs. Decker has a private fortune that it would keep the ordinary man busy taking care of.)
"Have you got an office down town?" inquired the man,



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"No," she said, "I transact all my business from my desk here in my home."

"Ah, that doesn't count neither," the man replied obdurately.
"Well, sir," said Mrs. Decker at last, "I am president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, an organization of over 800,000 women, and I attend to all my own correspondence," confident this time that she had provided something worthy the name of occupation; but that man just took out his memorandum book and said, "Well, I'll just put you down as not doing anything."

Her Experience in Declining

And so Mrs. Decker was classed in the city and state that better than any other have had opportunity to know of her work and her worth. For years she had been one of the workers in the Woman's Christian Temperance union and the Woman's club of Denver. She served as president of the latter organization and later, as president of the Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs. She first came prominently before the General Federation of Women's Clubs when it held its fourth biennial convention in Denver nine years ago. It was she who superintended the entertainment of the

convention, which was the first of the really big biennials, and which still stands unsurpassed. At that time the convention would have honored Mrs. Decker with the presidency of the General Federation, but she declined the honor, and incidentally established the precedent that practically eliminates the hostess city from the presidential contest if there chances to be one. But as Mrs. Decker's popularity permitted her to establish precedents it also enabled her to break them if she chose, but she did not choose to do so, and two years later at the Milwaukee biennial, when her friends would have violated the unwritten law that concedes a second term to each president, she for a second time declined the honor, and Mrs. Rebecca Douglas Lowe of Atlanta, Ga., was elected president. When the convention met at Los Angeles two years later Mrs. Decker's friends were determined she should accept the presidency of the General Federation, but again she declined, insisting that Mrs. Demies T. S. Dennison of New York, the vice president, who had carried the burdens of the chief executive office during Mrs. Lowe's absence in Europe the greater part of the term, should next have the honor as well as the work of the first office. Following this decision there came a demonstration such as seldom has been wit-

nessed in a body of the character of the biennial. Ignoring her refusal, she was nominated again and again from the floor. Seeing the determination of the house, Mrs. Decker rose from her seat in the balcony and declared she would not accept the office if she was elected, but it was not until she came to the rostrum and again refused absolutely to serve that the convention subsided. Two years later at St. Louis, when Mrs. Dennison had refused to serve another term, Mrs. Decker allowed her name to be proposed as a candidate, and her election was unanimous. At the St. Paul biennial in June, 1906, Mrs. Decker was unanimously re-elected for a second term and since that time has visited nearly every state federation in the country for the annual state convention, strengthening club work and gaining inspiration.

And besides being president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, Mrs. Decker is a member of the National Child Labor committee, the National Juvenile Improvement association, the National Civics association and of the State Board of Charities and Corrections of Colorado, in all of which organizations she actually works.

Woman Suffragist Also

Yes, and Mrs. Decker is a woman suffragist, too. She believes in it firmly and has had an active part in the municipal and state politics of Denver and Colorado since the enfranchisement of the women of that state. Upon the death of her husband, Judge Platt of Denver, she assumed the management of his estate for their daughter, her only child, and herself. Eight years ago she married Judge William S. Decker of Denver, and a few years later was again left a widow. In the management of her own business interests Mrs. Decker says she has come to appreciate more fully the advantages the women of her state enjoy over women of the states where they are less privileged politically.

Never have the women of the General Federation of Women's Clubs paid Mrs. Decker a greater compliment than when they selected her to present the long tabooed subject of woman suffrage before the St. Louis biennial. So tactfully and so clearly did she present it that before she had concluded the majority of even the conservative women in the audience had made the surprising discovery that they had always believed in her doctrine. There was nothing unwomanly nor dangerous in the privilege as she presented it. But with equal tact she has helped prevent this question coming before the biennials as an issue, knowing that the General Federation was not yet ready for it.

But she does advocate women interesting themselves in civil service reform. She has urged it upon club women as a positive duty to inform themselves regarding the condition and management of the various public institutions maintained for the care of unfortunate. "This work," she says, "is not politics, it is religion." It is upon this subject, civil service reform, that Mrs. Decker will speak in Omaha. It is not only the privilege but the duty of the mothers of the land to inform themselves upon the vital subjects of the day, she claims. While heartily in sympathy with all that pertains to culture and education, she is intensely practical, and one of her favorite stories is of a town that supported three or four Shakespeare and Browning societies, but that was appallingly run down at the heels from a civic standpoint.

Her Outline of Woman's Work

Summed up, this busy woman cannot be more justly estimated than as the recognized competent leader of the great organization of women, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the purpose of which she has outlined as follows:

"The General Federation is not a reform organization per se. It is broadly sympathetic with reform, but it is not a propaganda. It is not philanthropic distinctly, though one of the greatest agencies of the day for the careful study of methods and genuine helpfulness in this direction. It is not purely sociological, though with living interests and a splendid record for service in the uplifting work. It is in no sense political, yet its influence and power are to be seen in every state legislature, and it has the proud boast of having been a great factor in passing a long disputed federal measure through the senate during a recent session of congress. It cannot be called an academy or museum of art, yet one of the greatest authorities of the age has said that the years of study and demonstration in the clubs and federations have proven the wonderful results shown in the school room decorations and much of the arts and crafts movement by which a genuine love for and knowledge of art is being instilled into the coming men and women. It is not a university, yet a surprising stimulus has been given to the study of literature, science and history in hundreds and hundreds of American homes because of the club membership of mother or daughter. It has no bureau of publicity, yet through its membership of clubs and federations has been more far-reaching in disseminating knowledge and arousing public sentiment upon the questions which make for good citizenship than any other body of workers because of its broad inclusive lines and wide outlook."

Odd Corners in the Capitol That Are Little Known

WASHINGTON, Jan. 25.—The more one finds out about the capitol at Washington, the more one realizes that no other building in this country approaches it in interest. There are other buildings which are big or beautiful or historic. But for size, beauty and constantly growing historical importance, all rolled together, the grand old capitol sits supreme.

Anyone who has tried to find out things about the building has had convincing proof of its complexity. The number of things which any one official does know about it is surpassed only by the number of things he does not know. The place is a labyrinth in more ways than one.

There are out-of-the-way corners, queer little rooms, winding stairs, dusty attics and a vast underworld of which even the congressmen themselves never dream. As for the tourist, he gets a crick in the back of his neck by taking a ground hog view of the dome, acquires another crick—this time in his artistic perception—by viewing some of the ornaments of Statuary hall, plunks himself—though it is generally herself—into the vice president's chair, if the gentleman himself is absent, and gulps a few facts about Uncle Joe's domain in the house. But there are volumes of history and acres of space which he does not suspect, much less inspect.

There are over 430 rooms in the capitol. They range in size from the hall of the house of representatives, which is 129 by 93 feet, to mere scraps of rooms hardly large enough to hold a table and a couple of chairs.

Some of these little rooms are practically within the great walls which form the foundations of the rotunda; they are mere cells, circular in shape, but have served, nevertheless, as the private offices of congressmen.

Just what will be done with them now that the representatives have their offices in the new building is not definitely decided. But the whole capitol is so crowded that every inch of space will be in demand.

Another cubby hole of importance is just inside the entrance to the ground floor of the house wing; it is tucked in under the stairs, and probably not one in a hundred of those who pass so close to it knows of its existence. This is the key room. It is fitted up with all the paraphernalia of a locksmith's shop, that being precisely what it is.

When in his absorption in the cares of state a representative has left his desk key in his other clothes, or has lost it outright, the locksmith comes to the rescue. He has complete sets of duplicate keys, not only for the house desks, but for committee rooms as well.

If the emergency is only temporary he opens the desk with a duplicate key. If the original is actually lost he makes another to take its place. As this service is entirely free, perhaps the congressmen are more careless than the ordinary individual who has to pay for a similar job. At any rate, they do say that the locksmith is one of the busiest men in the building.

The capitol is a world in itself. It contains book stores, drug stores, barber shops, restaurants, baths, hardware store, postoffice, machine shop, carpenter shop, banks, libraries, blacksmith shop, boiler rooms, police station, telephone, telegraph and messenger service, plumbers and electricians, storerooms, repair shops, stenographers, physicians, preachers and even a bier upon which one's coffin might lie in state. This sounds rather comprehensive, but it is actually true.

To take the list in order. The book stores are two in number. In fact, almost everything at the capitol goes in pairs, one for the senate and one for the house. The book stores are the stationery rooms.

Each senator and representative is allowed \$125 a year for stationery. In the past that general head has covered a wide variety of articles. Up to a few weeks ago one could see in the showcase of the senate stationery room the most elaborate feminine fancies in card cases, pocketbooks and photograph cases.

Senators who did not need \$125 worth of paper, blank books, pens, clips, etc., were allowed to take out the balance in items which must have been extremely welcome to the female members of their families. The knickknacks have disappeared from the stationery room now and the senators are dealing strictly in the usual items, to which they are allowed to add the expense of such newspapers as they subscribe for.

The drug stores are not elaborate; still they contain a supply of the commoner remedies, as well as some things for use in emergencies. The barber shops are well known. Within the last few years they have been very much improved. The senators, by the way, are barbered free of charge in their shop. At the house end members pay for their shaves and hair cuts.

The baths adjoin the barber shop. Some of the tubs are cut from solid marble, but most of them are porcelain-lined. They will not be in so great demand now that the office buildings will supply better accommodations. In connection with the bath rooms there are resting rooms, where members can receive electrical treatments.

The restaurants are familiar to all capitol visitors. It is declared that capitol pies have a special delectable quality. The restaurant on the house side has been enlarged within a few years.

The postoffice, libraries and banks come in pairs, one each for the senate and for the house. The bank is not strictly a bank, but it looks like one and acts pretty much like one. It is the disbursing office where salaries are paid, money changed, checks cashed, etc., but only, of course, for members.

Down in the subbasement and in the marble terrace along the west front you could find, if anyone should guide you, the hardware store, the carpenter shop and all the other items which sound so irrelevant to the profession of law-making. They all come under the control of the superintendent of the capitol, Elliott Woods.

The division of authority, by the way, is one of the most peculiar things about the capitol. Mr.

Woods has control of the heating, lighting, ventilating, repairs and alterations, the care of the grounds, of the engine house (fire) and the stables, refurnishing and reconstruction, as well as much new construction. But under him the chief clerk of the house controls one group of supplies, the sergeant-at-arms is boss of something else and the secretary of the senate of something else.

The doorkeepers run the galleries. The policing of the capitol is under the control of a board composed of the sergeant-at-arms of the senate and the superintendent of the capitol. But the supreme authority goes back of this board and in the senate belongs to the vice president, in the house to the speaker and in the central part of the building to the superintendent of the capitol. And so it goes.

In the superintendent's domain below stairs you will find the hardware store, with every conceivable article for the use of carpenters and electricians. Not far off one opens a door and finds a carpenter busily sawing and nailing, making chests and railings and shelves and what not.

Painters, decorators, tilemakers, and electricians are coming and going. There are about 20,000 incandescent lights in the capitol. These, together with the wiring for telephones and electric bells, of which there are hundreds, keep a corps of men busy all the time.

The great ventilating systems by which over 60,000 feet of fresh air is supplied to the house of representatives and a proportionate amount to the senate occupy parts of the subbasement. People walking through the grounds often wonder what is the purpose of two low vine-green stone towers several hundred feet from the building. They are the nostrils through which fresh air is drawn for the capitol to breathe.

A big oil painting hangs on the white wall of the guage room of the ventilating plant. It is a pretty poor painting in spite of its gilt frame and brass plate. The latter states that the subject of

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