Populism and Feminism in a Newspaper by and for Women of the Kansas Farmers' Alliance, 1891–1894

by Marilyn Dell Brady

The emergence of the Farmers' Alliance movement in the 1880s brought new hope and a new sense of power to many farmers throughout the West and the South. Appearing first in Texas in the 1870s, the Alliance created cooperatives for buying and selling farm products. Its members published newspapers and held meetings to teach others the organization's new and potentially radical message that farmers could unite and gain control over forces they viewed as oppressive. Initially the Alliance avoided political involvement, but as the cooperatives and the mass meetings grew they laid the groundwork for effective political power. By 1890, the Populist party developed as the political arm of the movement, gradually overshadowing its other concerns.¹

Kansas farmers began to flock to the banner of the Farmers' Alliance after land prices collapsed in 1887 and drought struck in 1888. Plagued with large mortgages and falling prices for their goods, they were ready to listen to the innovative solutions being put forth by the Farmers' Alliance. As in other states, at first efforts of the Kansas Alliance went into organizing cooperatives, publishing newspapers, and holding mass meetings. By 1890, the Kansas Alliance claimed to have 100,000 members, and it had laid the foundation for a successful challenge of the traditional Republican monopoly of state government. Like the successes of the cooperatives that had preceded them, the victories won by the Kansas Populist party in 1890 offered Kansas farmers new avenues of power.²

For women as well as men the Farmers' Alliance promised hope and expanded opportunities for expression. While few women achieved the national prominence of Annie L. Diggs and Mary Elizabeth Lease, numerous others spoke, wrote, and organized for the movement. The Farmer's Wife, a monthly news-

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Annie L. Diggs, noted as a Populist orator and political organizer, was a prominent contributor to the Farmer's Wife. Born in Canada in 1848, she had moved to Kansas in 1873, where she was involved in temperance, women suffrage, and a variety of other reform movements.
women, as mothers, holding powerful positions in both their families and in society at large. Its articles demonstrate how, in their achievements, their frustrations, and their rhetoric, the women who wrote for the Farmer's Wife had much in common with other activist women of the late nineteenth century.3

The women whose writings appeared in the Farmer's Wife were a diverse group, ranging from the famous to the obscure. The major contributors to the paper and the driving force behind its production seem to have been Emma D. Pack, editor and co-owner of the paper; Bina Otis, wife of Populist Congressman John Otis; and Fannie McCormick, the foreman of the Kansas Knights of Labor. More well-known contributors included popular Alliance orators Annie Diggs and Mary Lease and national Woman's Christ-


ian Temperance Union officers Mary Livermore and Frances Willard. However, over half of the approximately thirty women whose original articles and poems appeared in the Farmer's Wife could not be identified, making generalizations about the contributors and their motivations hazardous.

Actual ownership and publishing responsibility for the Farmer's Wife rested with Emma Pack and her husband Ira, both of whom had been involved previously in Kansas newspapers. From 1884 to 1890, Ira Pack had published the City and Farm Record, a Topeka paper devoted to real estate and land sales. In 1890, he began advocating the Alliance cause, changed the name of his paper, and moved it to Burlington, Kansas. Meanwhile, Emma Pack was editing Villa Range: Ladies' Home Journal, Topeka, which consisted largely of reprinted fiction, fashion news, and domestic advice. By 1891, the Packs had both terminated their other papers and merged their resources into the Farmer's Wife. Ira edited the first three issues before turning the duties over to Emma, who continued to edit the paper for its three-year existence.

No publication or distribution statistics are available for the Farmer's Wife, and there is no evidence that the paper had a large or widespread readership. Information about the social and economic status of the women who wrote for the paper is scanty, but there is no reason to believe that they were themselves poverty-stricken farm women. Articles about the difficulties of getting good servants indicate that they had some financial security. The women who wrote most frequently for the paper seem to have lived in the Topeka area, and events taking place there received major coverage. Some speeches and letters by women from across Kansas were published, often from traveling lecturers or old friends. Although the Farmer's Wife aspired to be a national publication, the major contributors from outside Kansas were women active nationally in the prohibition movement and Emma Ghent Curtis, wife of a Colorado rancher. In the opening issue of the paper, Annie Digg's felt the need to respond to the charge that farmers' wives were not directly responsible for publishing the paper. Her position was that men who published farm journals were not actual farmers, and that no farmer or his wife would ever have time to edit a paper.

The ideological position of the women who wrote for the Farmer's Wife is somewhat easier to identify than their social position. These women clearly belonged to the more radical group within the Kansas Alliance movement. Like some of their male counterparts, they were more interested in cooperative ventures than in winning political elections or organizing as a party. Their commitment to urban workers and their advocacy of prohibition and woman suffrage set them off from those in their party who were ready and willing to accept fusion with the Democrats. The issues that most concerned the women of the Farmer's Wife were

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6. Biographical information on national leaders was found in the sources cited above. Additional information came from the Farmer's Wife itself and from the biographical files, vertical file indexes, and the Kansas card catalog in the Library, Kansas State Historical Society. Material was not found on the other contributors in these sources.

7. Kansas State Historical Society and Department of Archives, History of Kansas Newspapers (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1916); City and Farm Record, Topeka; and Villa Range: Ladies' Home Journal, Topeka; biographical clipping on I. W. Pack, Haskell County Clippings, 1:7; Library, Kansas State Historical Society.

ones that divided the Populist party in Kansas in the
1890s. 9

Three types of articles predominated in the pages
of the Farmer's Wife: political, domestic, and those that
sought to combine political and domestic themes. The
explicitly political articles attempted to further the Al-
liance cause and described women's involvement in
that movement. Some of these were written by local
women, and others were reprinted from other Alliance
papers. The vast majority of the articles by men in the
Farmer's Wife fell into this latter category. The women
responsible for the paper were also deeply concerned
with the domestic problems of rural women. Convin-
ced that farmers' wives lived lives of drudgery and
isolation, they deliberately wrote articles trying to be
cheerful and helpful. Most domestic articles, however,
were reprinted from eastern magazines. In addition,
local women constantly sought to interweave political
and domestic concerns around the image of responsi-
ble motherhood. By using such rhetoric, they were
able to justify political activities for themselves and for
other women and to argue that women had critical
roles to perform in both the home and in government.

The political articles in the Farmer's Wife give abun-
dant evidence that women did play an active role in the
Alliance movement, a more active one than has been
recognized generally by historians. Women were re-
ported serving as local officers in Alliance organiza-
tions and speaking at Alliance meetings throughout
Kansas. Accounts and letters of women who were trav-
eling as lecturers for the Alliance cause were printed
regularly in the Farmer's Wife. The paper also listed
the women who held public offices in the state in 1892
and claimed that over twenty Alliance newspapers
were edited by women. 10 In the opinion of Maud E.
Pack, daughter of the paper's editor and herself a sten-
grapher for the Populist governor of Kansas, "The
great influx of women in the Farmers' Alliance and
Industrial Union and kindred organizations in Kansas
proves conclusively that they are the power behind the
throne." 11

While many of the articles in the Farmer's Wife re-
printed or repeated standard Alliance rhetoric, the
paper also allowed its contributors to express their
own political views. Repeatedly, the women writing for
the Farmer's Wife directed their remarks to other
women and urged them to become active in support-
ing the Alliance cause. The wives of male leaders were
often directly addressed. At the same time, contribu-
tors to the Farmer's Wife wanted to secure a place for
themselves within the movement, and they consistently
sought to placate any fears Alliance men might have
about their participation.

The Farmer's Wife is full of examples of the way in
which women authors made clear that they did not in-
tend to attack the men when urging greater women's
participation in the Alliance. An article by Bina Otis
in the first issue is typical of their approach. Otis
asked pointedly, "Is it because our husbands love us
less that they do not surround us with as many com-
forts [as rich women have]?" With glowing optimism,
Otis described what the Alliance could do for homes
and, therefore, for women. Claiming that the Alliance
movement was "for the protection of our homes," she
asked, "Who can be more interested in the homes of
the country than the American woman?" She argued
that homes and women were essential to the political

9. The divisions among the Kansas Populists are major themes in
the works on that topic by Clinton and Nugent, cited above.
10. Farmer's Wife, January 1893, 1; August 1891, 8.
11. Ibid., July 1891, 3.
good of the country because “our homes are the hope of our nation, the nurseries of patriotism, the fortress of freedom, the center of national strength . . . .” In addition, she enumerated how the Alliance provided women with new opportunities for education and self-improvement, and she set forth the need for each woman to take a wisely, nonthreatening interest in the movement. “[W]e believe] that the highest ambition of every true wife is to be the helpmeet and companion of her husband . . . and that woman’s duties, in reform, as well as elsewhere, should be identical with man’s. Our husbands are beginning in this struggle and need our assistance.”

Such rhetoric was continually published in the Farmer’s Wife, but it was supplemented by more explicit, more controversial statements. By the second issue of the newspaper, contributors had moved beyond a defense of their own work in the movement to the advocacy of woman suffrage, the cause that came to dominate their paper. In the reprint of her Fourth of July address at Manhattan, Fannie McCormick placed the issue of suffrage in the context of her general statements about the need for patriotism and for the Alliance movement. Noting the presence of women in her audience, she stated:

The ladies are here because in this grand republic woman has been accorded more rights and privileges, and is more nearly on political equality with man, than in any nation on earth. They still remind their brothers, however, that “taxation without representation” is not justice, and threaten to throw “the tea overboard” if full suffrage is not given them.

Mrs. M. E. Clark, speaking before the Shawnee County Alliance, linked the cause of suffrage to women’s importance both in the Alliance movement and in the home. She praised Alliance men for wanting to “save our homes and our country,” but she claimed that they also needed “to recognize the fact that the wife and mother were as much interested in the movement as they.” She urged them to realize that just as a woman’s “counsels [sic] were sought and obtained on all matters of importance in the home, so also should she have a voice” in the movement. After elaborating how “the Alliance owed its success largely to its women,” Clark went on to ask pointedly, “But does it not seem strange, that knowing her true heart and wisdom, pertaining to the governing of the home, the rearing and moulding of the life and minds of their children, that she should still be deprived a voice in the governing of our country?”

During the fall of 1891, contributors to the Farmer’s Wife proposed an ambitious plan for using the national Alliance movement to increase women’s political impact. Emma Pack, Bina Otis, and Fannie McCormick were involved in organizing a group called the National Women’s Alliance (NWA), which they envisioned as uniting rural and urban women behind a broad program of reforms. The Farmer’s Wife was to be the group’s official publication. Wives of other Populist leaders were included in the incorporation of the organization, and vice-presidents representing twenty-five states and the District of Columbia were chosen.

The paper claimed that the National Women’s Alliance was “composed of farmers’ wives and the women of trades unions and wage workers’ and listed women’s groups who were joining behind its banner. These included the Ladies’ Christian Alliance of Sulphur Springs, Texas, the Illinois Women’s Alliance, several local South Carolina organizations, the Alliance Women’s Association of Kansas, the Factory Girls’ Union, the Women Wage Earners’ branch of the Alliance, the Women’s Labor Union, and the Alliance Kindergarten. It was predicted that the NWA would soon become “the leading organization of women in the United States, surpassing the currently popular suffrage and temperance clubs.”

Identifying themselves as “we, the industrial women of America,” the NWA published a statement of goals which clearly indicated an awareness of issues being debated within the Alliance movement and a willingness to support its more radical segments:

1st. To study all questions relating to the structure of human society, in the full light of modern invention, discovery and thought.

2d. To carry out into practical life the precepts of the golden rule.

3d. To recognize the full political equality of the sexes.

4th. To aid in carrying out the principle of cooperation in every department of human life to its fullest extent.

5th. To secure the utmost harmony and unity of action among the Sisterhood, in all sections of our country.

6th. To teach the principles of international arbitration and, if possible, to prevent war.

7th. To discourage in every way possible the use of all alcoholic liquors as a beverage, or the habitual use of tobacco or other narcotics injurious to the human system.”

12. Ibid., 1.
13. Ibid., August 1891, 1.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., September 1891, 4; November 1891, 8.
16. Ibid., November 1891, 8.
In the hope of furthering these goals, a national conference of the NWA was planned coinciding with the National Farmers' Alliance meeting scheduled for St. Louis in February 1892, where the diverse priorities of the movement were to be debated.

Nettie S. Nutt explained to the readers of the *Farmer's Wife* the reason the new organization was needed and the hope it held for women. Despite the fact the "women are far greater slaves to wage tyranny than men," Nutt complained that "working women have been too much neglected by the founders and advocates of labor organizations." She stressed the need for women to organize in their own behalf. Nutt proclaimed that if a woman "toils with man in his daily occupations, justice demands for her equal pay . . . ." Optimistic about the gains she believed women had made in recent years, Nutt had faith in their ability to choose between being independent and being "a slave to the needle or the loom." Victory for women was assured, she said, "if every advocate of female suffrage would join issues with every great political reform element, enrolling the nation's toilers under its banner . . . ." 17

In December, the *Farmer's Wife* reported the formation of more women's alliances and the endorsement of the NWA by the male leaders of the movement. This endorsement, however, differed significantly from the aggressive statements of purpose put out by the NWA. The men stated:

Resolved, That we endorse most heartily the educational bureau recently established, known as the National Woman's [sic] Alliance, which has for its objects the education of women of economic questions and of placing reform literature within reach of all the people.18

The national Alliance meeting in February 1892 proved a disappointment to the National Women's Alliance. Woman suffrage was buried and temperance defeated as delegates sought to bridge the differences between northern and southern elements in the movement.19 Frances Willard, who had worked actively and unsuccessfully to unite the Populists and the Prohibitionists, angrily described events for the *Farmer's Wife*, placing the blame on the "liquor wing and the conservatives of our southern brethren in the People's Party."20 Emma D. Pack editorialized about the convention's failure to adopt suffrage, plaintively remarking, "Brother, we only ask for the power to help you . . . . make the grand movement a success . . . . woe be to anyone who shall say that the dear old flag does not mean liberty for the mothers of this land."21 Emma Ghent Curtis addressed a poem "to A Colored Brother at the Conference" in which she called his opposition to woman suffrage particularly unfair because of women's efforts to end slavery.22

Curtis's poem drew an angry response from Mrs. J. T. Kellie. In a poem of her own, Kellie spoke for the black male delegates who opposed the woman suffrage plank. While admitting the justice of women's right to suffrage, the black man in her poem stated that to advocate it now would be fatally divisive for the

17. Ibid., 1.
18. Ibid., December 1891, 3.
21. Ibid., March 1892, 3.
22. Ibid., 1.
labor movement. Without unity, he maintained that the right of suffrage was useless.

For I stood there a living example
Of wrongs years of votes failed to right,
And long years to come yet will fail to,
Unless all the toilers unite.

Through her black male narrator, Kellie described black wives and daughters, agreeing that, since all wrongs could not be corrected immediately, woman suffrage should take second place to those issues about which laboring people could agree. 23

Like women in other movements for social change, the Alliance women were told — and were telling each other — that continued work for woman suffrage was fatally divisive. And like women in other movements, the Alliance women who favored suffrage began to look outside their own movement for projects and allies. Although the Farmer’s Wife continued to print the officers and bylaws of the NWA for another year, Emma Pack, Bina Otis, and Fannie McCormick abandoned efforts to work with men in the national Alliance movement and, instead, focused their attention on Kansas struggles. Along with urging the election of Mary Lease as senator, they aligned themselves with other woman suffrage advocates and pushed for the passage of equal suffrage in the state.

These new projects also encountered difficulties. Lease’s campaign came to nought, and the relationship between the Alliance women and other Kansas woman suffrage campaigners was stormy. In December 1891, the Farmer’s Wife carried a story about the annual Kansas Equal Suffrage Association meeting, claiming that almost half of those present were Alliance women whom a speaker had insulted by calling “calamity howlers.” In the course of the meeting, he was “properly rebuked,” and a Populist woman was chosen as an officer of the group. 24 The next year Populist women again were reported as being involved in the organization.

Emma Pack and Bina Otis were not content to work solely within the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association, however. In the spring of 1893, they reported the formation of another women’s organization, the Woman’s Progressive Political Club of Topeka. Seventy-five women, many of them unfamiliar to readers of the Farmer’s Wife, attended the first meeting. The reasons given for the club’s formation were said to be the pending vote on a state equal suffrage amendment and the rise of the Populist party which, the women claimed, needed the “molding influences of the patriotic and progressive women.” The club planned to “carry on a vigorous campaign of education along the lines of political economy, industrial co-operation and domestic science.” In addition to woman suffrage, the women hoped to ensure that “the politics of our state and nation [would] be made more than a mad scramble for office, or muddy whirlpool of corruption.” The women argued for “equitable distribution and economic consumption, . . . that land ought not to be monopolized,” and “that labor is the most important factor in creating wealth.” They also proclaimed that war should be abolished and maintained that the open saloon, the “mortgage fiend,” the “tax gatherer,” and the “railroad king” were evils that must be destroyed. “All sisters for reform” were encouraged to join. Local clubs in other towns were told to organize and send

23. Ibid., April 1892, 1.
24. Ibid., December 1891, 1.
delegates to a state meeting. A future national organization was envisioned but never achieved. 25

Although the Populist women showed increased willingness to work with other pro-suffrage women, they frequently reiterated that they had not given up their old loyalties. They repeated their allegiance to the Omaha Platform and their opposition to war and referred to themselves as “an auxiliary of the People’s Party.” 26 Bina Otis insisted that the Woman’s Progressive Political League, as the group came to be called, was “not a ‘suffrage association’” but “a political club that endorses equal suffrage and temperance.” 27

As Kansas moved toward a vote on the equal suffrage amendment in 1894, the suffrage issue began to predominate in the pages of the Farmer’s Wife, gradually squeezing out other materials. Pro-suffrage articles and speeches were regularly printed, along with refutation of various anti-suffrage positions. The visits of national suffrage leaders to Kansas were reported. When the state leaders of the Populist party endorsed suffrage in June 1894, their action was lauded, and no indication was given of the fierce struggle which had ensued over the passage of the issue. Following the failure of Kansans to pass the equal suffrage amendment in November 1894 and the poor showing of the Populist party in that year, the Farmer’s Wife ended its three years of publication. Although the newspaper had proven to be a vehicle that allowed women a new opportunity to express their political priorities and to further their own political goals, none of the causes dearest to the hearts of the contributors had been won.

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25. Ibid., April 1893, 4; May 1893, 3.
26. Ibid., August 1893, 1.
27. Ibid., May 1893, 1.
Suffrage, temperance, and pacifism remained unpopular among the majority of Populist men.

On the other hand, the contributors to the *Farmer's Wife* did not seem to share many of the goals generally considered significant by Populist men and by historians. The free silver issue and specific candidates' election campaigns seldom appeared in the *Farmer's Wife* except in occasional reprints from other papers. Even the dramatic incidents of the "legislative war" between Republicans and Populists received only passing attention. According to the evidence of the *Farmer's Wife*, women found space to act and to express themselves within the movement, but they and their concerns were never fully integrated into it. Their attempts to form a "woman's movement" within the Alliance movement failed.

Domestic as well as political concerns were regularly addressed in the *Farmer's Wife*, but again the women were not successful in achieving their goals. Contributors to the newspaper frequently expressed sympathy for what they saw as the wretchedness of rural women's lives. Maudlin stories by local women frequently told of sweet, weak, eastern women destroyed on Kansas farms. According to a typical description by Frances Garside, at thirty a farm woman was old and tired of her lot and her life. Annie Diggs claimed that large numbers of farm women were found in mental institutions and hoped that "possibly if the monotony of work and thought were more frequently broken by the reading of something not seen and learned in the daily round of farm life the proportion of mentally worn out farmers' wives might not be so large." Drudgery was a common theme. In her article "The Cook-Stove and Wash Tub," Bina Otis described a combination which she believed made "farmers' wives prematurely old, and serfs instead of the joyous queen . . . ." Fannie McCormick complained that although "new machinery has done much to lighten and lessen the work of men on the farm . . . dishwashing, cooking, scrubbing and ironing, like perpetual motion, seem beyond the skill of inventors." The *Farmer's Wife* was seldom able to offer concrete suggestions for alleviating such conditions. Certainly, the paper did provide farm women with varied reading material about new topics. Fiction for both women and children was regularly reprinted from eastern papers and magazines. Many advice columns addressed problems of rural living. With no sex stereotyping, articles offered suggestions on such topics as how to raise pigs and build milking stools. Other columns explicitly addressed problems of childrearing and housekeeping. Much of the reprinted material, however, seems to have had no relation to the lives women were actually living on Kansas farms.

Frequent articles described exotic places or told of fashionable living in eastern cities and resorts. Pictures and articles featured elaborately dressed women and children with tiny waists, lace, and frills hardly suitable for farm life. Suggested menus and advice for the hostesses also were far removed from the actual conditions farmers' wives faced. Such reading may have introduced a welcome element of novelty for rural women, but it did little to help them envision viable alternatives. In fact, these articles reinforced an upper-middle-class image of women as dependent and decorative rather than advocating radical changes in either women's roles or in the social and economic power structure.

Local contributors occasionally sought to address the concrete needs of farm women. Emily E. Lathrop published several articles that gave explicit advice to women on how to raise and educate their children. In her eyes, the home was the best place to educate children and "the greatest work of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Alliance . . . is to study the means of making and preserving the Home and Nursery as the basis of good society and a just Government." In order to do this, she proposed an organization called the National Children's Home Kindergarten and Industrial Alliance. She intended to print and distribute a series of leaflets that would aid women in educating their children in proper religious and economic views. Her sample questions, printed in the *Farmer's Wife*, stressed people's right to have debt-free, permanent homes. She criticized two kinds of people who she believed lived off the work of others: those who were "ignorant, vile savages, and lazy, poor vagabonds" and those who were "learned, greedy, civilized, and idle rich hypocrites." Her vision of the future was "to unite all families together into one National Cooperative Union."

30. Ibid., July 1891, 1.
31. Ibid., September 1891, 1.
32. Ibid. McCormick's article in the *Farmer's Wife* was reprinted as part of her novel, *A Kansas Farm on the Promised Land* (New York: John Alden, 1892). Evidence does not support the dire picture of the insanity of farm wives created by Diggs and other contributors to the *Farmer's Wife*.
34. Ibid., December 1891, 5; January 1892, 1; June 1893, 4. Lathrop and her husband James were engaged in a wide variety of religious and political reform activities, including the publication of the *Voice of True Reform*, Espeka, which reported on the *Farmer's Wife* and the National Women's Alliance.
While Lathrop devoted herself solely to educational programs, Bina Otis offered the readers of the *Farmer's Wife* a somewhat more sweeping social vision of what women's lives could be like in the future. Assuming that women would always “live for the coming generation,” she announced that “our highest ambition is to provide for our children, that they may develop [sic] into full manhood and womanhood, physically, mentally and morally.” She believed it would be possible to reorganize society so that “every able-bodied person can labor one-third of the time, rest one-third, and spend the remaining third in study and recreation.” Technological change was critical in achieving this goal. “Electricity will, eventually, assist us to reach the co-operative laundry and kitchen.” Then, Otis believed, “the mother of the coming time will be able to give to her children what she can not do while the present conditions of society exists, but is
what they most need: that is, more of her time.”

The alternatives being put forth by Lathrop, Otis, and other local women often implicitly contradicted the alternatives suggested in the reprinted stories and advice columns. But even Lathrop and Otis did not challenge traditional ideas of womanhood and offered no consistent analysis of the domestic problems of rural life. The connecting theme that does appear throughout the paper is an image of women exercising power both in their homes and in their communities. For the contributors to the Farmer’s Wife, as for other women activists of the era, the problems that both women and society faced were to be overcome by women assuming power in both the private world of the family and the public world of politics.

For this reason, whether the topic of discussion centered on political or domestic issues, the women who wrote for the Farmer’s Wife constantly invoked the ideal of motherhood. Authors repeatedly claimed that women’s duties to their families required them to become involved in political affairs. The words of Frances F. Allen were typical:

Mothers, what assurance have you that the dear little ones you feed and nurture so tenderly to-day will not help swell the numbers of hungry ones in the years to come, unless something is done to wrest the power from the merciless few . . . . Mothers, would it not be well to ponder over this pathetic story of fallen women? . . . in the fate of the thousands of women wage-earners of to-day, might possibly be mirrored the lives of your darling girls, unless there is a radical change . . . .”

A mother’s responsibility in educating her children was frequently a theme in the paper. As Nettie S. Nutt expressed it, “Educate and ennoble the mother and the result will be a nation of powerful intellects, wise, just and human laws and a prosperous, contented people, dwelling in the light of knowledge and liberty.” Mamie M. Bruner instructed mothers to “educate your daughters against this one great sin” of gos-

siping about “fallen women” and instead to help such women to live better lives. She believed that girls should be taught “that intellectual and spiritual attainments are higher and nobler than a silk gown or a new spring bonnet.” In her eyes, as women became “womanly,” by self-education and self-reform, the country would become a better place, and “the light, gentle, quick steps of women’s feet” shall be heard in the halls of Congress. More specifically, contributors to the Farmer’s Wife maintained that women had special responsibility to educate coming generations to the equality of the sexes. Nutt urged, “Let every woman join the ranks of educators, and in the glow of the closing era mould the minds that shall govern the future, to the recognition of women as the equal of man, and the mothers of the nation.”

Women’s motherly responsibility went beyond their own children, however, to encompass all the needy of the world. To again quote Nettie Nutt, “It is given to woman to guide the childlike, uplift the fallen and encourage the weak.” The cooperation of women would aid “the convulsions of mother earth as she travails in the birthpains of earth’s crowning era. which shall restore perfect manhood and place woman in her rightful place as the beauty and glory of the human race . . . .”

The Farmer’s Wife and the women who contributed to it cannot be said to have achieved their goals in either the political or the domestic sphere. Their efforts generally reveal their own confusion and ambivalence as well as the opposition they encountered in these areas. Nonetheless, the paper gives evidence that there were women within the Alliance movement speaking out in their own behalf and the behalf of other women. Like women in other movements, the women of the Alliance movement were working to improve women’s lot by seeking to gain a political voice, by addressing the domestic problems of women, and by trying to bring the private and the public spheres of their lives into closer harmony around images of responsible motherhood.


36. Farmer’s Wife, October 1891, 1.
37. Ibid., February 1892, 1.
38. Ibid., November 1891, 1.
39. Ibid., February 1892, 1.
40. Ibid., August 1891, 5.