

MODERN WOMAN
HER INTENTIONS

BY
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MODERN WOMAN

HER INTENTIONS

*Another fire has come into the harp,
Fire from beyond the world, and wakens it:
It has begun to cry out to the eagles!*

*W. B. YEATS,
Second version of "Shadowy Waters."*

PREFACE

There is a great difficulty in writing of the women of the first ten years of the twentieth century. This is to be the Woman's Century. In it she is to awake from her long sleep and come into her kingdom; but when I look about me I find myself surrounded by the most terribly contradictory facts. We know there is to be a revaluation of all values—we know that old rubbish is to be burnt up, that the social world is to be melted down and remoulded “nearer to the heart's desire”; but at the same time we have to recognize that in spite of the enthusiasm of the alchemists and the transmuters of base metal into gold, the main body of society is as yet hardly aware of the fire that is to burn it.

In writing of this change I have to explain to one set of women, who will think me outrageously advanced, my opinions of another set of women, who will think me absurdly conventional.

I think I had better own up at once that as an artist I am prejudiced against the exhibition of the necessities of nature. I am like Mr. Galsworthy's little toy terrier, who disliked the strong odours of real life. Yet at the same time I have a passion for the discussion of life; the salt of wit makes me enjoy the strongest flavours. So I present myself and my limitations to my readers, hoping that my fervid faith in the delight of the communion of thoughts, emotions, and sympathies will make up for my lack of conviction in some other directions.

Before we proceed any further I think I ought to point out that the degradation of women in the past originated in the region of the

country round Mount Ararat. The lowering of their status occurred when the white races adopted the Assyrian Semite's Scriptures. The Christian religion brought us that curse cowering behind its gospel of glad tidings; and it is most remarkable to trace the way in which the Jews' religion crept into Europe under the cloak of Christianity. In heaven, the Gospel says, there is love, but neither marriage or giving in marriage. Are we to wait for heaven or the millennium before the present system of marrying and selling in marriage shall be abolished? Everyone who has read a modern encyclopædia is familiar with the fact that the first chapters of Genesis are made up of two different narratives. One, called the Priestly narrative, from the beginning to the first part of the fourth verse of the second chapter of Genesis, and continued in the first five verses of the fifth chapter. There is nothing derogatory to women in this narrative. The unpleasant details about Adam and Eve are in the Prophetic narrative, which is given from the second part of the fourth verse of the second chapter to the twenty-sixth verse of the fourth chapter. The Jews have taken advantage of the confusion of these two contradictory stories to fix the blame of all social evils on Eve, just as the Hesiod, influenced by Eastern legend, fixed it on Pandora. These myths come from the same region, a region in which women were kept entirely for the amusement and service of men, and were humbled by every kind of insult that the Semite mind could invent. Women have a very long score to settle with the Jews and the Mahommedans. Even Hindoo women were comparatively respected and free until the Mahommedans brought their ideas into Hindostan. And I am told that in nearly every city of ill-fame in the world the profits arising from the procuring of girls are collected by the Chosen Nation. The Semites founded their opinion of women on fabulous legends and false science. They assert that man gives the spirit and woman the

matter to the child. Embryology has now taught us that the parents make exactly equal contributions of chromatin, or the active element, to the original cell from which a child develops. It has taught us that, originally, cells are capable of self-reproduction; that sex is not always a vital necessity, but often a device for securing variety. It has taught us by experiment that boys come from their mother's right side, and girls from her left side, and in a healthy mother the rhythm of sex is regular. The symbolism of the Fall might indeed apply to the history of the cell which at first contains its own force of reproduction, but in the case of a female ovum deliberately parts with some of its original power in order that it may be replaced by the vital power of a male. The male cell also rends itself apart, and becomes quite unfit for reproductive purposes until it can find another cell with which to join. In the simple facts which have been observed through microscopes there is no place for the overweening pride of the Semite race in the virtue of maleness; and I can only hope that it was ignorance and not malice that led the Jews and the Arabs to spread false doctrine on the subject of sex. It is unfortunate that the first patriarchs, from whom they proudly count their descent, had much in common with the primitive goat worshippers, who were responsible for the one-sided arrangements for sexual contentment common in harems and the other patriarchal institutions I have mentioned.

In the great mediæval revival, the real age of chivalry and troubadours, the knights carried their ladies' colours to victory in vain. The old lies are in our blood—we still believe in Eve and her shame. White men have fought in the past, and it remains for white women to fight now, and at last rid their sex all over the world of the ignominy of this false doctrine.

I

THE VOTE

It is my conviction that all great changes come from a force that after many years of silence blazes with emotional, passionate enthusiasm. That long period of torpid latent life, once it is liberated from prison, gives driving power. Without silence and darkness no new creature can be brought forth. Without resistance no great desire can be felt. It is the same with the woman's movement.

When the vote was refused, the first artillery for the woman's army was forged. That little request for the vote might have been granted three years ago without making any more difference than the borough council vote here, or the parliamentary vote in New Zealand, Australia, Norway, Finland, and so forth, has made already. That little request, that might have passed almost unnoticed had it been granted, has raised up a powerful body of feeling on both sides, that will end in one of the greatest social revolutions of the time.

Whether women are militant or anti-militant, whether they ask for the vote in order to fight the working man or to join hands with him, whether they content themselves with words of approval and donations, or whether they lose their tempers in denunciation of the unfeminine behaviour of certain brave enthusiasts—yet all the women of many opinions are alike rousing themselves from their former deadly attitude of quiescent acceptance.

The most violent anti-suffragette is obliged to try to understand the questions of social reform in order to protest against them. The most downtrodden wife is hearing rumours that even now there are laws which might protect her from domestic tyranny. The county ladies who never read anything but *The Queen*, *The Spectator*, or *Punch*, protest against the struggle, but admit that it is time that women of property had a vote now that their butlers and coachmen have obtained that privilege. The “too old at thirty” brigade is carrying the campaign into the ballroom and skating-rink. All this is familiar to everyone that moves in English society to-day, and one word of terror used by men who oppose the vote is heard on all sides. They say the vote is “the thin end of the wedge,” and I reply gladly from my side—not only as a suffragist, but as an onlooker at the loves and hatreds of the sexes—I reply that the wedge is being driven every day. Every day of delay in giving women the vote gives them a power far more deadly, a hope more dangerous, an accomplishment far more vital. It gives them the power of standing up for themselves, freed from the belief in the protection of men. It gives them hope in each other. It teaches them to speak for themselves, and discover the force of their eloquence and the ingenuity of their resources. It is impossible to go to a meeting of the militant party without feeling amazement at the dexterity of all concerned. With wit, with banter, with beauty, with dignity, awkward questions are answered, coarse, jokes are frustrated, and swift as light the laugh is turned against the interrupter.

The odd contrast between the scenes we personally witness and the same scenes served up for breakfast by the daily press, is having some effect in breaking up the touching faith of our foremothers in the accuracy of newspaper reports. Women are awake to public affairs for the first time since the matriarchal period. They are

weighing the evidence of the press, they are considering political facts. They are said to be losing the chivalrous adoration of men. But in contrast to the politeness of men to well-dressed, good-looking women, I would call attention to the attitude of a respectable hospital official towards a poor woman who, in November, 1909, brought her little boy as an out-patient.

She arrived very early in order to be able to go to her work with as little delay as possible, and secured a seat before the men, who came in later. When the attendant entered, she was made to go back to the last seat of all and wait for her son to take his turn until all the elder males had been interviewed. "Men come first, your place is at the back," was all the answer she got to her protests. So much for chivalry when a woman is poor and worn with labour. It is pathetic to see the working woman, apologetic for her poverty, apologetic for her womanhood, apologetic for her ill-health or any temporary need of help. And I say that the working woman's heroic patience has been attained by centuries of ill-usage and *lack* of chivalry. Most women would not understand the idea of chivalry if it were explained to them, so little does it come within their range of experience. We have no conception of the size of the mass we are dealing with. In England and Wales there are about 17 million females. Of these females, 13 million are past childhood, roughly speaking 6 million of these are unmarried, 7 million are married or widows. About 9 million married and unmarried women are unoccupied, or have retired from business; about 4 million are engaged in occupations, and trying to make their own living. Of the 16 million males, about 2 million are unoccupied or retired, 10 million are occupied, and the rest are children. Now we find from the last census that about 7 million women are in charge of a family, and 3 million of these are occupied in business; 6

million women are unmarried, about 1 million of these are occupied in business, and nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ million have independent means. Making allowance for the very young, we have about $2\frac{1}{2}$ million grown women in a dependent position without a husband or an occupation in England and Wales alone.

If one spends an afternoon studying the census returns, one sees in all occupations the well-paid businesses are for men, and the ill-paid for women. In general and local government, defence of the country, and professional occupations, 326 thousand women only have subordinate posts, but there are nearly 2 million in domestic service. Textile manufactures, 663 thousand; dress, 710 thousand; food and lodging, 300 thousand, but in commerce and finance only 60 thousand.

Men can no longer support their daughters, and daughters cannot command good positions in lucrative professions. There are only 7 million families, and at least 4 million grown-up women, unmarried and superfluous as mothers. The working man tells these women to "go home and do the washing." "Well," a virgin replies, "one million of us are working at laundry and other work, under half a million of us are amusing ourselves on independent incomes, and the rest of us have to while away life somehow without money or occupation, so we are making a revolution."

The struggle for the vote is putting heart into the superfluous woman, and it is putting the hope of reorganizing the market value of women's labour into her heart. We not only want work, but we want good wages. If we have children we want to be sure they will be cared for and fed. If we keep house we want our wages. The 12 million females that have no independent income cry out to the $\frac{1}{2}$ million that has an independent income, in their almost hopeless

struggle to win fair wages. It is interesting to think that out of the total population of about 32½ million in England and Wales, a very little over ½ million are living on independent incomes, and we find that there are less than 100,000 heirs, and more than 400,000 heiresses in this country. The rest, that is 32 million, have to work or starve so as to save enough for their old age. Each person that lives at ease is surrounded by sixty-five people that have to struggle. Each woman that has a husband knows that a widow or spinster stands portionless beside her. Figures are abstractions, but behind these figures are facts and problems that are driving us before them with such resistless cruelty that at last we are determined to cry halt and make a fight—vote or no vote!

II

WOMEN'S INCOMES

Let us say that certain *prime donne* can earn £25,000 a year for a few years, that the most successful London actress may receive a salary of £5000 a year, that a successful novelist may get a few thousands a year by her books, that a lady doctor or dressmaker may make £1000 a year, and you have admitted all that can be said in favour of the present means women have of making a large income on the same lines as men. I suppose the average successful singer is delighted with £1000 a year, the average successful actress with £10 a week or £500 a year, the average novelist with £300 a year, and the average lady doctor with the same. In an institution which gives £1000 a year to its male principal, we find the lady superintendent receiving £200 a year, and the male secretary £350. Women find it hard to get any professional income out of the Government offices, the Church, or the law courts. In the Post Office and in all educational work the disparities between the salaries of men and women is well known. And I think we may take it for granted that the average business income of an everyday sort of woman, working hard, is less than £100 a year. The income of a charwoman in London, we know, is 2s. 6d. a day, or a possible 15s. a week—that is, 3d. an hour, exactly half a man's minimum wage.

These are a few well-known facts. The reason is that women are said to have “other means” of earning a livelihood. First among these comes the comfortable possibility of inheriting money from

relations. Many great heiresses and little heiresses are to be found among the conservative forces of the land, for these women have nothing to gain and everything to lose by changing the present state of things. They and the insurance offices alike prosper on the present foundations of English family life.

Next comes the probably miserable alternative of marrying a rich husband. It is a very curious thing that it is harder for a rich man to be naturally attractive to women than it is for the camel to pass through the needle's eye, and the consequence is that women generally have a more or less unhappy domestic life when they definitely marry for a livelihood.

Then we have the adventuress, who succeeds in making a handsome income by the unscrupulous use of her intelligence and charm. After that come the various types of women who hire themselves or are hired out for the relief of excitable gentlemen. And lastly the crowd of desolate diseased refuse who pick up a living any way they can, in ways too horrible to think of, by the practice of vulgar indecency.

All these incomes which are earned by women, either by their tenderness and charm or by their bestiality, are, together with the family inheritances, the real reasons why women as a sex are not made economically independent on the same lines as men. The father of a family longs to save his daughters from the temptations of poverty, and if they do what he bids them he insures his life in their favour. The husband prefers to keep his wife dancing to the tune he pays for, so he makes her allowance dependent on his own mood of the moment. The infatuated boy considers he is seeing life when he spends his money recklessly on an adventuress. All these women can undersell other women in the labour market, because

they have incomes which make them independent of what they may earn there. They are, in a kind of way, what the strike organizers would call “blacklegs”: they make life more difficult for the women who must work to live or starve.

Again, the magic of love is destroyed by the thought of money. And love is very apt to evaporate when such thoughts flame up in the mind.

The hope I see for the ennobling of sex relations is that women should, by some means never yet thought of, become independent of the caprice of individual man.

The average middle-class Englishman, I believe, looks upon his married life as a kind of business partnership, in which he pays money in order that he may not be worried about the care of his clothes or his food or his affectional needs. These things once settled and put under the care of a sensible woman, he can devote his thoughts to business, to betting, to cards, to golf, or any other amusement he may select to ensure that he may not become a “dull man.” The average working man, of course, not only marries a housekeeper, a cook, a maid-of-all-work, but the mother and nurse of his continuous flow of offspring, and the butt of his temper when the world has used him ill.

If any hope of eventual economic freedom is to come for the whole sex, I stand aghast to think of all the antagonistic interests that will have to be reconciled. It will be worse than the Budget. The wives will have to stand out for fixed allowances. The mothers will have to make their bargain either with their husbands or the State, whichever wants their children most. The housekeepers will have to take their wages like the other servants.

The women of the adventuress class are a hopeless problem. They are worth a hundred a week at one moment, and nothing at all a few weeks later perhaps. Their trade is so dangerous. But we can cheer ourselves up with the statistics which tell us they are in England and Wales numbered by thousands only, whereas we are dealing at present with the problem of seventeen millions of women.

We have, then, four classes of women—the heiresses, the portionless wives, the courtesans, and the prostitutes—who stand in the way of the economic independence of women because they appear to be better off under the present state of disorganization. The labour market for women is of course permeated by their influence. The rich women who work for nothing, the wives who “get round” their husbands, the courtesans who command the “flesh market,” the prostitutes, who are ignored by the rest of their sex, but revenge themselves on the ignorant by spreading disease and sorrow among the happy and healthy.

The record of the overwhelming advantages of the economic independence of women can hardly be compressed into the compass of this chapter. It would make love marriages possible. It is almost certain that a love marriage on the woman’s side is one of the most important elements for good in the production of a fine race. If a girl were free to choose according to her inclination, there is practically no doubt that she would choose the right father for her child, however badly she might choose a lifelong companion for herself.

This is, of course, true about both the sexes to a certain extent, although average men are much less dainty about these matters than the average woman. If we could remove the economic

considerations from parenthood it would help towards the invigoration of the race.

The sad part of this question is that according to all the great racial ideals women ought to be economically independent, but, according to all little social ideals, it seems inevitable that her independence will be resisted to the last.

III

THE VARIATIONS OF LOVE

We cannot trust ourselves to make a real love-knot unless money or custom forces us to “bear and forbear.” There is always the lurking fear that we shall not be able to keep faith unless we swear upon the Book. This is, of course, not true of young lovers. Every first love is born free of tradition; indeed, not only is first love innocent and valiant, but it sweeps aside all the wise laws it has been taught, and burns away experience in its own light. The revelation is so extraordinary, so unlike anything told by the poets, so absorbing, that it is impossible to believe that the feeling can die out. Sometimes one feels a great pity for the lovers in England, because young English girls are very apt to mistake a feeling of gratified vanity and the emotion of a new sensation for love of some special man who happens to make love to them at the propitious moment. Many faithful women go through life enduring the love of a man whom they care for very moderately, who, on his side, congratulates himself on having found a virtuous wife. It is lucky for these people that probably the wife, in her limited circle of acquaintances, will never meet the man who ought to have been her mate.

I have often talked to the apparently contented mother of a family, when some little word reveals to me that it is possible to be the mother of a man’s children merely by putting up with his caresses while one thinks about some other subject. Is it any wonder that

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