

THE NEW WOMAN

AN ORIGINAL COMEDY IN FOUR
ACTS BY SYDNEY

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CHARACTERS.

Gerald
Cazenove.
Colonel
Cazenove.
Captain
Sylvester.
James
Armstrong.
Percy
Pettigrew.
Wells.
Servants.
Margery.
Lady
Wargrave.
Mrs. Sylvester.
Miss Enid
Bethune.
Miss Victoria
Vivash.

Dr. Mary
Bevan.

Acts 1 and 2: *At Gerald Cazenove's.*
Act 3: *Drawing-room at Lady Wargrave's.*
Act 4: *An Orchard at Mapledurham.*

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	PA
	GE
A	5
ct	.
I.	
A	40
ct	.
II.	
A	69
ct	.
II	
I.	
A	91
ct	.
I	
V	
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THE NEW WOMAN.

ACT I.

Scene.—Gerald Cazenove's *Chambers. A sitting-room, somewhat*

effeminately decorated. The furniture of the boudoir type, several antimacassars and a profusion of photographs and flowers. The main entrance, R. at back, in the flat. Doors, R. and L., window, L. of flat.

A knock is heard off, as curtain rises. Enter Wells, L., crosses stage and opens door in flat. Enter Colonel Cazenove and Sylvester.

COLONEL.

Is my nephew at home?

WELLS.

No, Colonel; but I expect him every moment.

COLONEL.

Very well; I'll wait. [*Exit Wells, door in flat.*] Bah! what a stench of flowers! [*Opens window and throws out a bunch of lilies standing on the table below.*] Sit down, Sylvester—if you can find a chair to carry twelve stone.

SYLVESTER.

Really, I feel a sort of trespasser.

COLONEL.

Sit down.

SYLVESTER [*sits*].

I don't know Cazenove very well——

COLONEL.

I'm much in the same case. Since he came up to town,

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I've only called upon him once before. By Jove, it was enough. Such a set as I met here!

SYLVESTER.

I understood that he was up the river.

COLONEL.

Came back yesterday. Hope it's done him good. After all, he's my nephew, and I mean to knock the nonsense out of him.

SYLVESTER.

Colonel, you're very proud of him; and you have every reason to be. From all I hear, few men have won more distinction at Oxford.

COLONEL [*pleased*].

Proud of him? My dear Sylvester, that boy has more brains in his little finger than I have—gout. He takes after his aunt Caroline. You remember Caroline?

SYLVESTER.

Oh, I remember Lady Wargrave well.

COLONEL.

Wonderful woman, sir—a heart of gold—and a head—pew! Gerald takes after her. At Oxford, he carried everything before him.

SYLVESTER [*laughing*].

And now these women carry him behind them!

COLONEL.

But he's a Cazenove! He'll come right side up. We Cazenoves always do. We may go under every now and then, but we come up again! It's in the blood.

SYLVESTER.

According to my wife—and Agnes is a clever woman in her way——

COLONEL.

Don't know her.

SYLVESTER.

His cultivated spirit and magnetic intellect are one of the brightest hopes for the social progress of our time—[*Laughs.*] whatever that may mean!

COLONEL.

Does it mean anything? That is the sort of jargon

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Gerald was full of, when I saw him last. But he'll get over it. Intellectual measles. Oxford's a fine place, but no mental drainage.

SYLVESTER.

I can form no opinion. I hadn't the advantage of a university training.

COLONEL.

I had. I was rusticated. We Cazenoves always were—till Gerald's time. But he'll redeem himself. We Cazenoves have always been men, except one. That's my sister, Caroline; and, by Jove, she's the next best thing—a woman.

[Rising, in his enthusiasm—the antimacassar slips on to the seat.]

SYLVESTER.

A real woman.

COLONEL.

Caroline's a heart of gold——

SYLVESTER.

Yes, so you said.

COLONEL.

Did I? I beg your pardon. *[Sits on the antimacassar, instantly springs up, and flings it into a corner. Points to that covering Sylvester's chair.]* Throw that thing away!

SYLVESTER.

All right. I'm used to 'em. We grow 'em at our house. *[Looks round.]* I might be sitting in my wife's boudoir! Same furniture, same flowers, same photographs—hallo, that's rather a pretty woman over there!

[Crosses.]

COLONEL.

A pretty woman, where? *[Crosses.]* No, not my style!

SYLVESTER.

Ha! ha!

COLONEL.

What are you laughing at?

SYLVESTER.

My wife! I didn't recognize her.

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[Goes about examining photographs.]

COLONEL.

Ten thousand pardons! I had no idea——

SYLVESTER.

Bless me, my wife again!

COLONEL [*looking*].

That's better. That's much better.

SYLVESTER.

It's an older photograph. Agnes was quite a woman when I married her, but she grows more and more ethereal. Philosophy doesn't seem very nourishing.

COLONEL.

She's a philosopher?

SYLVESTER.

Haven't you read her book? "Aspirations after a Higher Morality."

COLONEL.

The old morality's high enough for me.

SYLVESTER.

I've tried to read it, but I didn't succeed. However, I've cut the leaves and dropped cigar ash on the final chapter. Why, here she is again!

COLONEL.

Three photographs? And you're not jealous?

SYLVESTER.

My dear Colonel, who am I to be jealous?

COLONEL.

Her husband, aren't you?

SYLVESTER.

Yes, I am Mrs. Sylvester's husband. I belong to my wife, but my wife doesn't belong to me. She is the property of the public.

Directly I saw her photograph in a shop-window I realized the situation. People tell me I've a wife to be proud of; but they're wrong. Mrs. Sylvester is not my wife; I am her husband.

COLONEL [*taking up a book*].

This is what comes of educating women. We have created a Frankenstein. "Man, the Betrayer—A Study of the Sexes—By Enid Bethune."

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SYLVESTER.

Oh, I know her. She comes to our house.

COLONEL.

And has a man betrayed her?

SYLVESTER.

Never. Not likely to.

COLONEL.

That's what's the matter, perhaps?

SYLVESTER.

Her theory is, that boys ought to be girls, and young men should be maids. [Colonel *throws down the book*.] That's how she'd equalize the sexes.

COLONEL.

Pshaw! [*Takes up another book*.] "Ye Foolish Virgins!—A Remonstrance—by Victoria Vivash."

SYLVESTER.

Another soul! She's also for equality. Her theory is, that girls should be boys, and maids should be young men. Goes in for latchkeys and that sort of thing.

COLONEL [*throws down the book*].

Bah! [*Takes up a third*.] "Naked and Unashamed—A Few Plain Facts and Figures—by Mary Bevan, M.D." Who on earth's she?

SYLVESTER.

One of the plain figures. *She* comes to our house, too.

COLONEL [*reads*].

“The Physiology of the Sexes!” Oh, this eternal babble of the sexes! [*Throws book down.*] Why can’t a woman be content to be a woman? What does she want to make a beastly man of herself for?

SYLVESTER.

But my wife isn’t a woman.

COLONEL.

None of them are, my boy. A woman, who *is* a woman, doesn’t want to be anything else. These people are a sex of their own, Sylvester. They have invented a new gender. And to think my nephew’s one of them!

[*Strides up and down, seizes another antimacassar and flings it into another corner.*]

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SYLVESTER.

Oh, he’s young. Don’t despair!

COLONEL.

I don’t despair! Do you suppose this folly can continue? Do you imagine that these puffed-up women will not soon burst of their own vanity? Then, the reaction! then will come *our* turn! Mark my words, Sylvester, there’ll be a boom in men!

[*Rubbing his hands.*]

Enter Gerald, door in flat.

GERALD.

Good afternoon. I’m sorry to have kept you waiting.
[*Shakes hands with Colonel.*]

COLONEL.

Here you are, at last.

GERALD [*shaking hands with Sylvester*].

How’s Mrs. Sylvester?

SYLVESTER.

I was just going to ask you. You see more of her than I do.

GERALD.

We are collaborating.

COLONEL.

In the Higher Morality?

SYLVESTER.

How are you getting on?

GERALD.

Oh, we are only on the threshold. I finished the first chapter about daybreak.

COLONEL.

That's how you waste the precious hours of night? Gad, sir, when I was your age——

GERALD.

That was thirty years ago. Things have changed since then.

COLONEL.

And they haven't improved.

GERALD.

That is a question.

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COLONEL.

Oh, everything's a question nowadays! Nothing is sacred to a young man fresh from Oxford. Existence is a problem to be investigated; in my youth, it was a life to be lived; and, I thank Heaven, I lived it. Ah, the nights *I* had!

SYLVESTER.

Would it be impertinent to inquire upon what subject my wife is engaged?

GERALD.

Our subject is the Ethics of Marriage.

SYLVESTER.

Of my marriage?

GERALD.

Of marriage in the abstract.

COLONEL.

As if people married for ethics! There is no such thing, sir.

There are no ethics in marriage.

GERALD.

That is the conclusion at which we have arrived.

COLONEL.

You are only on the threshold, and yet you have arrived at a conclusion?

GERALD.

So much is obvious. It is a conclusion to which literature and the higher culture inevitably tend. The awakened conscience of woman is already alive to it.

COLONEL.

Conscience of woman! What are you talking about? I've known a good many women in my time, and they hadn't a conscience amongst 'em! There's only one thing can awaken the conscience of woman, and that is being found out.

GERALD.

I am speaking of innocent women.

COLONEL.

I never met one.

GERALD.

Yet——

COLONEL.

Tut, tut, sir; read your Bible. Who was it had

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the first bite at the apple? And she's been nibbling at it ever since!

GERALD.

Well, well, uncle, you don't often come to see me; so we won't argue. Can I prevail on you to stay to tea?

COLONEL.

To stay to *what*, sir?

GERALD.

Tea. At five o'clock, I have a few friends coming. Mrs. Sylvester—[Sylvester *puts down photograph and turns*]—Miss

Bethune—Miss Vivash——

SYLVESTER.

And Dr. Mary Bevan?

GERALD.

Yes, I expect Miss Bevan.

COLONEL.

“Naked and Unashamed?”

GERALD.

They may bring Percy with them.

COLONEL.

Percy?

GERALD.

Percy Pettigrew.

COLONEL.

A man? An actual man? A bull amongst that china?

SYLVESTER.

Well, hardly!

COLONEL.

You know him, Sylvester?

SYLVESTER.

They bring him to our house.

GERALD.

Nobody has done more for the Advancement of Woman.

SYLVESTER.

By making a public exhibition of the Decay of Man.

GERALD.

Sylvester, you're a Philistine. I won't ask you to stay.

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SYLVESTER.

Man the Betrayer might be dangerous, amongst such foolish virgins.

COLONEL.

The danger would be all the other way. I am not sorry *I* shall

have protection. My sister, Caroline, will be here at five.

GERALD.

Aunt Caroline! [*A little nervously.*]

COLONEL.

I came to announce her visit.

SYLVESTER.

Lady Wargrave has returned to England?

COLONEL.

After ten years' absence. She has been travelling for her health, which was never too robust; and since Sir Oriel's death, she has been more or less a wanderer.

GERALD.

I knew she had arrived, but I postponed presenting myself till I was summoned. My aunt has the kindest of hearts——

COLONEL.

A heart of gold, sir.

GERALD.

And a pocket too. Nobody knows that better than I do. Since my parents' death, she has been father and mother, as well as aunt, to me. But there was always something about aunt that made one keep one's distance.

COLONEL [*in a milder voice than he has yet used*].

And there is still, Gerald.

GERALD.

Then I'm glad I've kept mine.

COLONEL.

You acted very wisely; I happen to know she wished her arrival kept secret and to descend upon you like a *dea ex machinâ*. Caroline always had a sense of dramatic effect. But how the deuce did you know of her return?

GERALD.

Oh, very simply. Margery told me.

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COLONEL.

Margery!

GERALD.

Aunt wrote to summon her to resume her duties.

COLONEL.

But Margery's at Mapledurham. Caroline was stopping with some friends in Paris, and Margery was sent on to her father's.

GERALD.

Six weeks ago.

COLONEL.

Why, you know all about it.

GERALD.

Yes, I was staying there when she arrived. I have been rustivating for the last six weeks. It's so much easier to write in the fresh air.

SYLVESTER.

You have been writing down at Mapledurham?

GERALD.

That's what I went for.

COLONEL.

For six weeks?

GERALD.

Six weeks.

COLONEL.

And you have only finished the first chapter?

GERALD.

It's so difficult to write in the fresh air. One wants to go out and enjoy oneself. And then old Armstrong's such a jolly old boy.

SYLVESTER.

Armstrong, of Mapledurham? The farmer? Oh, I know him well. I go there for the fishing.

COLONEL.

Then, do you know Margery?

SYLVESTER.

Margery? No.

GERALD.

How that girl sculls!

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COLONEL.

Oh, Margery was rowing?

GERALD.

Do you know, uncle, she can almost beat me?

COLONEL.

But what an arm she has!

GERALD.

And when she feathers?—

[*Pantomime.*

COLONEL.

Ah! when she feathers?—

[*Double pantomime.*

GERALD.

What a voice, too!

COLONEL.

Hasn't she!

GERALD.

So musical! When she sings out, "Lock, ho!"

COLONEL [*imitating*].

"Lock, ho!"

GERALD.

No, not a bit like that—more silvery!

COLONEL.

Not a bit! more silvery!

BOTH [*pantomiming*].

"Lock, ho!"

SYLVESTER.

Who's Margery?

COLONEL.

Oh, my dear fellow, just your sort—*my* sort—well, hang it, every man's sort! Margery is—oh, how can I explain? If I'd seen a Margery thirty years ago; well, I should never have been a bachelor! Margery is—come, Gerald, what *is* Margery? Margery is a woman, who—— Well, Margery's a woman! That's all Margery is!

GERALD.

Old Armstrong's daughter. We grew up together. When I was very young, I was considered delicate, and I was sent to the farmhouse at Mapledurham. When I went to Eton, Lady Wargrave took Margery into her service. There she has remained——

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COLONEL.

And she is coming with your aunt to-day.
[*Knock at door in flat. Re-enter Wells, followed by Mrs. Sylvester, with a small portfolio.*]

WELLS.

Mrs. Sylvester!
[*Exit, door in flat.*]

MRS. SYLVESTER [*stops short on seeing Sylvester.*].

Jack!

SYLVESTER.

This is an unexpected pleasure. [*A cold matrimonial kiss.*]
Colonel Cazenove—my old Colonel. Mr. Cazenove I think you know.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Well, of course, Jack! How ridiculous you are! Should I be here if I didn't know Mr. Cazenove?

SYLVESTER.

I haven't the least notion. I only know you wouldn't be at home.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

I was in all the morning.

SYLVESTER.

I had business at the Horse Guards. I shall be home to dinner, though.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Oh dear, I wish I had known that. There's only mutton.

SYLVESTER.

The same mutton?

MRS. SYLVESTER.

What do you mean by same?

SYLVESTER.

I mean the mutton I had yesterday.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Did you have mutton yesterday?

SYLVESTER.

No matter; I'll dine at the club.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Thank you, dear.

SYLVESTER.

Good-bye. [*Kiss.*] Good-bye, Mr. Cazenove.

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COLONEL.

I will come with you. [*To Gerald.*] I am due at your aunt's.

GERALD.

But I shall see you again presently?

COLONEL.

If I am visible behind Caroline. Madam, your servant. [*Aside to Sylvester.*] Cheer up, Sylvester! I'll join you at the club, and we will wind the night up at the Empire.

[*Exit after Sylvester, R. of flat.*]

MRS. SYLVESTER.

That is so like a man! Doesn't say he's coming home, and then

expects six courses and a savoury!

GERALD.

There is a difference between cold mutton and six courses, to say nothing of the savoury.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

It is a fine distinction, and in no way affects the validity of my argument.

GERALD [*smiling*].

You mean, of your statement.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Husbands are all alike. The ancient regarded his wife as a slave, the modern regards her as a cook.

GERALD.

Then they are *not* alike.

MRS. SYLVESTER [*emphatically*].

A man thinks of nothing but his stomach.

GERALD.

That is another proposition.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

You're very argumentative to-day. I haven't seen you for six weeks, and you've come home in a nasty, horrid temper!

GERALD.

I have been working so hard.

MRS. SYLVESTER.

Why is your face so brown?

GERALD.

Well, of course, I went out.

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MRS. SYLVESTER [*takes his hand*].

And why are your hands blistered?

GERALD.

I had a few pulls on the river; and being out of training——

MRS. SYLVESTER [*innocently*].

Were you stroke?

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