

## GREEK WOMEN

by

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### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The history of woman is the history of the world. Strait orthodoxy may remind us that man preceded woman in the scheme of creation and that therefore history does not begin with woman; but this is a specious plea. The first historical information that we gain regarding Adam is concerned with the creation of woman, and there is nothing to show us that prior to that time Adam was more active in mind or even in body than a mollusc. It was not until the coming of woman that history began to exist; and if the first recorded act of the woman was disastrous in its consequences, at least it possesses the distinction of making history. So that it may well be said that all that we are we owe to woman. Whether or not the story of the Garden of Eden is to be implicitly accepted, there can be no doubt that from the moment of the first appearance of mankind on the scene woman has been the ruling cause of all effect.

The record of woman is one of extremes. There is an average woman, but

she has not been found except in theory. The typical woman, as she is seen in the pages of history, is either very good or very bad. We find women saints and we find women demons; but we rarely find a mean. Herein is a cardinal distinction between the sexes. The man of history is rarely altogether good or evil; he has a distinct middle ground, in which we are most apt to find him in his truest aspect. There are exceptions, and many; but this may be taken as a rule. Even in the instances of the best and noblest men of whom we have record this rule will hold. Saint Peter was bold and cautious, brave and cowardly, loving and a traitor; Saint Paul was boastful and meek, tender and severe; Saint John cognized beyond all others the power of love, and wished to call down fire from heaven upon a village which refused to hear the Gospel; and it is most probable that the true Peter and Paul and John lived between these extremes. Not so with the women of the same story. They were throughout consistent with themselves; they were utterly pure and holy, as Mary Magdalene,--to whose character great wrong has been done in the past by careless commentary,--or utterly vile, as Herodias. Extremism is a chief feminine characteristic. Extremist though she be, woman is always consistent in her extremes; hence her power for good and for evil.

It is a mistaken idea which places the "emancipation" of woman at a late date in the world's history. From time immemorial, woman has been actively engaged in guiding the destinies of mankind. It

is true that  
the advent of Christianity undoubtedly broadened the  
sphere of woman and  
that she was then given her true place as the companion  
and helper  
rather than the toy of man; but long before this period  
woman had  
asserted her right to be heard in the councils of the  
wise, and the  
right seems to have been conceded in the cases where the  
demand was  
made. Those who look upon the present as the  
emancipation period in the  
history of woman have surely forgotten Deborah, whose  
chant of triumph  
was sung in the congregation of the people and was  
considered worthy of  
preservation for all future ages to read; Semiramis, who  
led her armies  
to battle when the Great King, Ninus, had let fall the  
sceptre from his  
weary hand, and who ruled her people with wisdom and  
justice; and others  
whose fame, even if legendary in its details, has come  
down to us.  
Through all the ages there was opportunity for woman,  
when she chose to  
seize it; and in many cases it was thus seized. Rarely  
indeed do we find  
the history of any age unconcerned with its women.  
Though their part may  
at times seem but minor, yet do they stand out to the  
observant eye as  
the prime causes of many of the great events which make  
or mark epochs.  
When we think of the Trojan War, it is Agamemnon and  
Priam, Achilles and  
Hector, who rise up before our mental vision as the  
protagonists in that  
great struggle; but if there had been no Helen, there  
would have been no  
war, and therefore no Iliad or Odyssey. We read  
Macaulay's stirring  
ballad of Horatius at the Bridge, and we thrill at the  
recital of

strength and daring; but if it had not been for the  
virtue of Lucretia,  
there would have been no combat for the bridge, and the  
Tarquins might  
have ended their days in peace in the Eternal City. And,  
in later times,  
though Mirabeau and Robespierre and Danton and Marat  
fill the eye of the  
student of the cataclysmic events of the French  
Revolution, it was the  
folly of Marie Antoinette that gave these men their  
opportunity and even  
paved the way for the rise and meteoric career of a  
greater than them  
all.

These are instances of mediate influence upon great  
events; but there  
have been many women who have exerted immediate influence  
upon the story  
of mankind. That which is usually misnamed weakness is  
generally held  
to be a feminine attribute; and if we replace the term  
by the truer  
word,--gentleness,--the statement may be conceded. But  
there have been  
many women who have been strong in the general sense;  
and these have  
usually been terribly strong. Look at Catherine of  
Russia, vicious to  
the core, but powerful in intellect and will above the  
standard of  
masculine rulers. Look at Elizabeth of England, crafty  
and false, full  
of a ridiculous vanity, yet strong with a strength  
before which even  
such men as Burleigh and Essex and Leicester were  
compelled to bow.  
Look at Margaret of Lancaster, fighting in her husband's  
stead for the  
crown of England and by her undaunted spirit plucking  
victory again and  
again from the jaws of defeat, and yielding at last only  
when deserted  
by every adherent. Look at Clytemmstra and Lady Macbeth,

creatures of  
the poet's fancy if you will, yet true types of a class  
of femininity.  
They have had prototypes and antitypes, and many.

Women have achieved their most decisive and remarkable  
effects upon the  
history of mankind by reaching and clinging to extremes.  
Extremism is  
always a mark of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm accomplishes  
effects which  
must have been left forever unattained by mere regulated  
and  
conscientious effort. The stories of the Christian  
martyrs show in  
golden letters the devotion of women to a cause; and I  
have no doubt  
whatever that it was in the deaths of young maidens, in  
their hideous  
sufferings borne with resignation and even joy, that  
there came the  
conviction of truth which is known as the seed which was  
sown in the  
blood of the martyrs. The high enthusiasm which  
supported a Catherine  
and a Cecilia in their hours of trial was strong to  
persuade where the  
death of a man for his convictions would have been  
looked upon as a  
matter of course. It is from this enthusiasm and  
extremism that there  
sounds one of the key-notes of woman's nature--her  
loyalty. Loyalty is  
one of the blending traits of the sexes; yet, if I were  
compelled to  
attribute it distinctively to one sex, I should class it  
as feminine in  
its nature.

Loyalty to one idea, to one ideal, has been a  
predominant characteristic  
of woman from time immemorial. Sometimes this loyalty  
takes the form of  
patriotism, sometimes of altruism, sometimes of piety in  
true sense; but

always it has its origin and life in love. The love may be diffused or concentrated, general or particular, but it is always the soul of the true woman, and without it she cannot live. Love for her God, love for her race, love for her country, love for the man whom she delights to honor--these may exist separately or as one, but exist for her they must, or her life is barren and her soul but a dead thing. Love, in the true sense of the word, is the essence of the woman-soul; it is the soul itself. She must love, or she is dead, however she may seem to live. That she does not always ask whether the object of her love, be it abstract or concrete, be worthy of her devotion is not to be attributed to her as a fault, but rather as a virtue, since the love itself expands and vivifies her soul if itself be worthy. It is at once the expression and the expenditure of the unsounded depths of her soul; it is through its power over her that she recognises her own nature, that she knows herself for what she is. The woman who has not loved, even in the ordinary human and limited meaning of the word, has no conception of her own soul.

Thus far I have spoken of love in its broad sense, as the highest impulse of the human soul. But there is another and a lower aspect of love, and this is the one most usually meant when we use the word,--the attraction of sex. Even thus, though in this aspect love becomes a far lesser thing, it possesses no less power. The passion of man for woman has been the underlying cause of all history in its

phenomenal aspects.

The favorite example of this power has always been that of Cleopatra and Mark Antony; but history is full of equally convincing instances.

To love and to be loved; such is the ultimate lot of woman. It matters not what accessories of existence fate may have to offer; this is the supreme meaning of life to woman, and it is here that she finds her true value in the world. She may read that meaning in divers manners; she may make of her place in life a curse or a blessing to mankind. It matters not; all returns to the same cause, the same source of power. The strongest woman is weak if she be not loved, for she lacks her chief weapon with which to conquer; the weakest is strong if she truly have won love, for through this she can work miracles. Her strength is more than doubled; heart and brain and hand are in equal measure, for that with which the heart inspires the brain will be transmitted by the heart to the hand, and the message will be too imperative to fear failure.

It is a strange thing--though not inexplicable--that your ambitious woman is far more ruthless, far more unscrupulous, far more determined to win at any cost, than is the most ambitious of men. Again comes the law of extreme to show cause that this should be; but the fact is so sure that cause is of less interest. Not Machiavelli was so false, not Caligula was so cruel, not Caesar was so careless of right, as the woman whose political ambition has taken form and strength. That which bars

her path must be swept aside, be it man or notion or principle. She sees but the one object, her goal, looming large before her; and she moves on with her eyes fixed, crushing beneath her feet all that would turn her steps.

I have spoken of the cruelty of an ambitious woman; and it is worth while to pause a moment to consider this trait as displayed in women--not as a means, but as an end. There have been men who loved cruelty for its own sake; but they are few, and their methods crude, compared with the woman who have felt this strange passion. In the days of human sacrifices, it was the women who most thronged to the spectacles, who most eagerly fastened their eyes upon the expiring victims. In the gladiatorial combats, it was the women who greeted each mortal thrust with applause, and whose reversed thumbs won the majority for the signal of death to the vanquished. In the days of terror in France, it was the woman who led the mob that threatened the king and queen, and hanged Foulard to a lamp post after almost tearing him to pieces; it was the women who sat in rows around the guillotine, day after day, and placidly knit their terrible records of death; it was the women who cried for more victims, even after the legal murderers of the tribunals grew weary of their hideous task of condemnation.

Not only thus--not only under the influence of excitement and passion--but in cold blood, there are instances among women of such

ghastly cruelty that men recoil from the contemplation of such deeds. There is record of a Slavonic countess whose favorite amusement was to sit in the garden of her country palace, in the rigors of a Russian winter, while young girls were stripped by her attendants and water poured slowly over their bodies, thus giving them a death of enduring agony and providing the countess with new, though unsubstantial, statues for her grounds. This not more than two centuries ago, and in the atmosphere of so-termed Christianity. The annals of the Spanish Inquisition would be ransacked in vain for such ingenuity of torture; and though the Inquisitors may have grown to love cruelty for its own sake, they at least alleged reason for their deeds; the Russian countess frankly sought amusement alone.

Yet in these things there is to be found no general accusation of women. That cruelty should be carried by them to its extreme, that they should love it for its own sake, is but the development of extremism, and is isolated in examples, at least by periods. The Russian countess was not cruel because she was a woman, but, being cruel of nature, she was the more so because of her sex. The ladies of imperial Rome did not love the sight of flowing blood because they were women, but, being women, they carried their acquired taste to bounds unknown to the less impulsive and less ardent nature of men.

Yet there comes a question. Is this lust for blood, this love of cruelty; latent in every woman and but restrained, by

the gentler  
teachings and promptings of her more developed nature in  
its highest  
presentation? So some psychists would have us believe;  
but they have  
only slight ground for their sweeping assertion. That  
civilisation is  
but restrained savagery may perhaps be conceded; but if  
the restraint  
has grown to be the ever-dominant impulse, then has the  
savage been  
slain. It is not, as some teach, that such isolated  
idiosyncrasies as we  
have considered are glimpses of the tiger that sleeps in  
every human  
heart and sometimes breaks its chain and runs riot. As a  
rule, these  
things are matters of atmosphere. Setting aside such  
pure isolations as  
that of the Russian countess, it will almost invariably  
be found that  
the display of feminine cruelty, or of any vice, is of a  
time and place.  
There has never been a universal rule of feminine  
depravity in any age.  
Babylon, Carthage, Greece, Rome, and all the olden  
civilisations have  
had their periods when female virtue was a matter of  
laughter, when  
women outvied men in their moral degradation, when evil  
seemed  
triumphant everywhere; but there always remained a few  
to "redeem the  
time," and salvation always came from those few.  
Moreover, the sphere of  
immorality and crime was always limited. The Roman  
world, when it was  
the world indeed, might be given up to vice and sin,  
displayed in their  
most atrocious forms by the women of the Empire; but  
there still stood  
the North, calm, virtuous, patient, awaiting its  
opportunity to "root  
out the evil thing" and to give the world once more a  
standard of purity

and righteousness. The leaven of Christianity was effective in its work upon the moral degradation of the Roman Empire; but it was not until the scourge of the Northmen was sent to the aid of the principle that success was fully won. So the North was not of the same day with Rome in civilised vice, and the reign of evil in the Latin Empire was but the effect of conditions, not the instincts of humanity. Rome was taught evil by long and steadfast evolution; it did not spring up in a day with its deadly blight, but was the result of progressive causation.

It may be doubted if the feminine intellect has increased since the dawn of civilisation. To-day woman stands on a different plane of recognition, but by reason of assertiveness, not because of increased mental ability. As with that of man, the possibilities of woman's intellect were long latent; but they existed, and the result is development, not creation of fibre. I repeat that I do not believe that the feminine intellect has grown in power. I doubt if the present age can show a mind superior in natural strength to that of Sappho; I do not believe that the present Empress of China, strong woman as she is, is greater than Semiramis, or that even Elizabeth of England was the equal of the warrior-queen of Babylon. But there can be no doubt that there exists a broader culture to-day than ever before and that thus the intellectual sum of women is always growing, though there comes no increase in the mental powers of the individual. It has been so with

man. We boast of the mighty achievements of our age; but we have not yet built such a structure as that of the Temple of the Sun at Baalbec, or the Pyramid of Cheops at Ghizeh. We pride ourselves upon our letters; but the grandest poem ever written by man was also the first of which we have record--the Book of Job, and we do not even know the name of the poet who thus set a standard which has never since been reached. We may claim Shakespeare as the equal of Homer in expression; but it requires true hero worship among his admirers to place the Elizabethan singer upon an equality with the old Greek in any other respect. There has been no growth of individual intellect in either sex since the days of which we first find record; but there has been an increase of average and a definition of tendency which are productive of higher general result. And the natural consequence of this state of things is found in the fact that even a Sappho in the world of letters would not stand out so prominently, would not be considered such a prodigy, were she to come in these days. We should admire her genius and her powers without feeling the sensation of wonder that these should be possessed by a woman. It is in the recognition of this fact that we are better enabled to understand the changing aspect in the relations of women to men during these latter years. There has been no alteration in the possibilities within the grasp of the individual, but great change within those which can be claimed by the sex at large. Women can do no more now than in the olden days when they were considered as almost inferior to

animals; but woman  
has profited by the opportunities of her time, and is  
every day  
developing powers until now unsuspected.

[Illustration 12 \_ASPASIA After the painting by Henry  
Holiday. Aspasia  
was born in Miletus. At an early age, accompanied by  
another young girl,  
Thargelia, she went to Athens. Their beauty and talents  
soon won them  
distinction--Thargelia married a king of Thessaly, and  
Aspasia married  
Pericles, "more than a king," says Plutarch. The home of  
Aspasia in  
Athens was frequent by the\_ elite \_of the city and  
state, attracted by  
her beauty, her art of speaking, and her influence.  
Socrates valued her  
great mind, and even called himself one of her  
disciples. Plato speaks  
of her great reputation. She was born in the fifth  
century before  
Christ. The date of her death is not known.\_]

The whole value of history is in teaching us to  
understand our own time  
and to prognosticate the future with some degree of  
correctness. More  
especially is this true of all class history, and the  
story of sex  
development may be so rated. It is to find the reason of  
what is and the  
nature of what is to come that we turn to the records of  
the past and  
ask them concerning their message to us of these things.  
In our  
retrospective view of woman, we shall, if we are alive  
to suggestion,  
find steadfast tendencies of development. It is true  
that these  
tendencies do not always remain in the light; like  
rivers, they  
sometimes plunge underground and for a time find their  
paths in

subterranean channels where they are lost to sight; but they always reemerge, and at last they find their way to the central sea of the present. Future ages will doubtless mark the course of those tendencies not only up to but through our own age; for though I have spoken of a central sea, the simile is hardly correct, inasmuch as the true ocean which is the goal of these rivers is not yet in the sight of humanity. But we at least find promise of that ocean in the steadfast and determined course of the streams which flow toward it; progress has always a goal, though it may be one long undiscerned by the abettors of that progress. So it is with the story of woman. We know what she has been; we see what she is; and it is possible dimly to forecast what she will be. Yet I dare to assert that there will be no radical change; there may be new direction for effort, new lines of development, but the essential nature will remain unaltered. It is not, however, with this informing spirit that we have to do in such a work as this. There have been many misconceptions regarding woman; I would not venture to claim that none now exist. Yet there is a general consensus of agreement concerning her dominating and effective characteristics, and the probability is that in these general laws so laid down the common opinion is of truth.

Of course, I would not dare to make such an absurd claim that there exists, or has ever existed, a man who could truthfully say that he knew woman in the abstract; but that does not necessarily

mean that knowledge  
of the tendencies and characteristics of the sex is  
impossible. The  
reason of the dense ignorance which prevails among men  
concerning women  
is that the men attempt to apply general laws to  
particular cases; and  
that is fatal. It is absolutely necessary, if we are to  
gather wisdom  
and not merely knowledge from our researches in history,  
that we should  
take into account the result of combination of traits.  
Otherwise we  
should not only find nothing but inconsistency as a  
consequence of our  
study, but we should utterly fail to understand the  
tendencies of that  
which we learn. We must be broad in our judgments if we  
are to judge  
truly. When we read of the Spartan women sending forth  
their sons to die  
for their country, we must not believe that they were  
lacking in the  
depth of maternal affection which is one of the most  
beautiful  
characteristics of the feminine nature. Doubtless they  
suffered as  
keenly as does the modern mother at the death of her  
son; but they were  
trained to subordinate their feelings in this wise, and  
their training  
stood them in stead of stoicism. Nay, even when we read  
of the  
profligacy of the women of imperial Rome, we must not  
look upon these  
women as by nature imbruted and degraded, but we must  
understand that  
they but yielded to the spirit of their environment and  
their schooling.  
They were not different at heart, those reckless Maenads  
and votaries of  
Venus, from the chaste Lucretias or holy Catherines of  
another day; they  
simply lacked direction of impulse in right method, and  
so missed the

culmination of their highest possibilities.

There is an old saying which tells us that women are what men make them. Thus generally stated, the saying may be summed up as a slander; but it has an application in history. There can be no doubt that for millenniums of the world's adolescence women were controlled and their bearing and place in society modified by the thought of their times, which thought was of masculine origin and formation. This state of affairs has long since passed away, and it may be said that for at least a thousand years, in adaptation of the saying which I have quoted, the times have been what women have made them. It was the influence of women which brought about the outgrowths of civilisation in the dawn of Christianity that have survived until now. It was the influence, if not the actual activity, of women that was responsible for the birth of chivalry and the rise of the spirit of purity. It was the influence of women that made possible such characters as those of Bayard and Sir Philip Sydney. It was the influence of women that softened the roughness and licentiousness of a past day into the refinement and virtue which are the possessions of the present age.

There has always, in the worst days, been an undercurrent of good, and its source and strength are to be found in the eternal feminine spirit, which in its true aspects always makes for righteousness.

The world's statues have, with few exceptions, been raised to men, the

world's elegies have been sung of men, the world's  
acclamations have  
been given to men. This is world justice, blind as well  
as with bandaged  
eyes. Were true justice done--were the best results, the  
results which  
live, commemorated in stone, the world itself, to adapt  
the hyperbole of  
the Evangelist, could hardly contain the statues which  
would be reared  
to women. But it is precisely in the cause for this  
neglect that there  
lies the value of the work which has been done by woman  
for the welfare  
of mankind. It is one of the truths of history that the  
greatest and  
most enduring effects have always been accomplished in  
the least  
conspicuous manner.

The man who searches effect for cause must find his goal  
most often in  
the influence of a woman. Not always for good; that  
could not be. But it  
would seem that all that has endured has been for good,  
and that the  
evil which has been wrought by woman--and it has not  
been slight--has  
been ephemeral in all respects. I know of no enduring  
evil that can be  
traced to a woman as its source; but I know of no  
constant good which  
did not find either its beginning or its fostering in a  
woman's thought  
or work. Poppaea leaves but a name; Agrippina leaves an  
example. It may  
be true of men that the evil that they do lives after  
them, while the  
good is oft interred with their bones; but it is not  
true of women. Of  
course, there is a sense in which it is true--in the  
descent from mother  
to son of the spirit of the unrighteous mother; but even  
this would not  
seem to hold as a rule, and the effects are often

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