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## INTRODUCTION

THE first of these articles was published in the August number of the *Westminster Review* for 1888. It was entitled "Marriage," and is here reprinted with additions and modifications. The last was published in the *Westminster Review* for January and February 1894, and is the last article in this volume.

It is extremely difficult to compile a volume of essays, written at different times, on the same subject, especially if that subject be controversial, without repeatedly insisting on the same fundamental points of the argument; for on those points the whole contention hangs. Each essay, being self-contained, is bound to dwell upon them more or less, since no sub-argument is of any final value unless the main ground of the doctrine be also stated. Certain repetitions which occur in this volume are therefore intentional, indeed, unavoidable. In writing on this question from time to time, I have been endeavouring to go over the whole field generally, and in particular, treating the matter mainly from the historical point of view, and as much as possible—considering the vastness of the subject and the number of its branches—in a condensed form.

The whole series will be found to bring evidence from all sides, to prove that the greatest evils of modern society had their origin, thousands of years ago, in the dominant abuse of patriarchal life: the custom of woman-purchase. The essays show that this system still persists in the present form of marriage and its traditions, and that these traditions are holding back the race from its best development. It is proved, moreover, that it is a mere popular fallacy to suppose that our present sex-

relationship is a natural and immutable ordinance, there having been a long period during which the family was ruled by the mother, and its name and property handed down through her.

It will be clear to any reader of the articles that sentiments and standards, rather than legal machinery, are relied upon as a method of reform; the law being regarded merely as the means of stereotyping the advance in sentiment when it is achieved; accompanying, not preceding, the change of feeling.

Therefore, it is idle, from my point of view, to point out the disasters that would follow any serious legal change, although such change must eventually be the sign and seal of the altered standards, and of the consequently altered nature of civilised mankind. It might be proved up to the hilt that freer marriage laws, if passed immediately, would end in social disruption, without for a moment weakening one word of what has here been written. Indeed, he who shows the evils which exist under our present traditions, has only strengthened my argument. Our social evils have been produced by the relation of man to woman as that of possessor to possessed; yet they are, strange to say, adduced by those who uphold the order, as reasons for preserving that relationship intact. These evils, we are assured, would make any change in marriage impracticable. This is arguing in a vicious circle indeed; and if we applied the method to every other question, it is clear that *all* reforms would be impracticable.

Imagine a young family, consistently brought up to over-eat themselves, and imagine this tendency encouraged by all the household arrangements, so that self-control would be neither expected nor possible. The effects of such training, when the family grew up, would, however, force its rulers to adopt some sort of emergency measures to mitigate the disasters which their educational errors had caused. And the first thing

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which occurs to the average intelligence, in such a case, is to make a number of rules and regulations, by which it is fondly hoped that the offenders may be coerced into orderly conduct. And now imagine this mode of education pursued, not in a single family but throughout a whole society. The results would naturally be the same, on a larger scale. Food, and all affairs connected with it, would thenceforth become a matter for stringent legislation; not only notorious gormandisers, but also average over-eaters would be hedged round with sumptuary laws. One and all would be forced to submit their commissariat department to the care of the State, and perhaps of the Church; and any unchastened attempt to evade such supervision would be deemed immoral license, and the offenders would be banned by society.

Now, supposing some one should protest against this interference with a man's culinary arrangements, as an offence against his personal liberty, we may be very sure that all those who had most ardently supported the gormandising system would cry out in alarmed concert: "For heaven's sake refrain from interfering with the Structure of Society! Can you not see that you propose to give rein to Gluttony in all its most repulsive forms? Do you not perceive that freedom of choice regarding food would land us in moral chaos of the most appalling description?"

This is a rough parallel to the case of the marriage reform, and it will partly explain the extreme difficulty of answering questions on what is called the practical side of the matter.

I have endeavoured to show that the misdirection of the mighty forces of heredity, education, habit, which have brought us disaster, might have led us, (had they been directed wisely), and may still lead us, to victory. But this is obviously not the work of one generation, nor of one department of reform, and it is for this reason that the matter cannot be treated in that brisk, business-

like manner that seems to be desired. It is not like a question of local government, or even of imperial government, where the issues, however important, deal with the machinery rather than with the elements of human life.

It will be seen in the following essays that the doctrine here upheld is one which has for its foundation, as I believe, the facts of history, sociology, heredity, and indeed all human experience, rightly understood. Paradoxical as it may sound, it is for that very reason supremely difficult to give a satisfactory answer when one is asked what one would substitute for the present form of marriage, a question often put, as if it could be answered in the same manner as, for instance, what one would substitute for big sleeves as a feature of dress, when those excrescences ceased to be esteemed. It is not a mere matter of putting one object in the place of another object, as one substitutes one block for another in a puzzle. In the life of a tree, the later stages are not *substitutes* for the earlier ones. The development is continuous and gradual, the flower being the culmination of the growing process. In the same way, human nature is in a state of development, and its institutions are the expressions of its stages of growth. No great and fundamental institution was ever put bodily into the place of a preceding one. The new one was absolutely non-existent at the time of those first movements of thought which ended by abolishing the earlier condition; and had the final state of affairs been foreseen by the reformers of the era, it would have no more been possible to anticipate that state by legal enactment than it would be to cause a flower to appear on a tree which was just beginning to thrust forth its first young leaves. It would be, however, perfectly possible to train that young plant, of set purpose, in such a direction, and to place it in such soil, as to finally cause it to bring forth that flower which, for many generations, can bloom only in the imagination of a small minority.

It is that process of training to which I am trying to direct the efforts of all who believe that the present relation of the sexes is barbarous, and that the coercive system of marriage is in only too complete harmony with that barbarism. What we have to deal with is the sap and life-force which produces the growth.

It will now be seen why the ever-recurring question : —What would you substitute for the present marriage system ?—cannot be answered in a sentence. The true answer is not single in its character, but manifold : it would lead the mind of the inquirer over the widest fields of history, of sociology, of science, of psychology ; it would take him back into a far and legendary past, wherein he would find disproof of many a cherished preconception which, in his wildest dreams, he had never doubted.

Nevertheless, legal reform, though a derivative matter, is a very important one. The first step that we may look for, in this direction, is the equalising of the divorce law for men and women, and some greater measure of justice as regards parental rights. Very much later will the modification of the coercive element be demanded, and this will follow from the decline of the present possessive and barbaric sentiment. In course of time, people will begin to resent State interference with their private affairs, and especially will they object to being forced to live with one another against their will. They will not regard this compulsion as “sacred.” By the time they have arrived at this stage of feeling, they must of necessity take a new view of the relationship *per se*. Seeing that they no longer tolerate the situation *when enforced*, they would naturally think more seriously before entering upon it at all. Marriage without its spiritual sanction would be held intolerable, and if so, wherein lies the danger of dispensing with coercion ?

In a recent unsigned article in *The Spectator*, the writer, whose sex is unknown, gives a vivid picture of a woman’s life under present conditions ; and if ever any-

one wishes to know why many women have not written Shakespeare's plays (as it is generally quaintly expressed) or composed Mozart's symphonies, he has only to read this eloquent description. It is seldom, indeed, that we find so clear a realisation of the weary detail of domestic duties, of the unending petty responsibilities, the constant call "to give small decisions and settle minute emergencies." Yet this writer, apparently so full of insight, actually does not hesitate to doom women for ever, quite irrespective of their individual tastes and powers, to the eternal treadmill. He (or she) observes: "The carrying on of the race is so important a function as to more than justify the devotion of the half of mankind *to this end alone*" (*italics mine*). So long as men have the disposal of the lives of women, through the might of law and tradition, we shall continue to hear utterances of this kind. Men will make and women will echo them. It will continue to be taken for granted that the accident of sex shall alone be held sufficient to fix the destiny for life; the ever-serviceable plea of "nature" being adduced in support of the doctrine.

It seems to be forgotten that "nature" indicates all sorts of things which civilised beings presume to ignore, and that if we followed her dictates, in all directions, we should return to our aboriginal caves in the rocks, and pick up a precarious subsistence by devouring such missionaries as a beneficent Providence might send for the replenishment of our stock-pot. Moreover, we should be landed in strange predicaments, were we to conclude that because Nature has given certain powers, she requires them to be used to the exclusion of all others. Nature has bestowed the gift of sleep, but she does not require us to sleep all day and all night. She has bestowed powers of locomotion, yet she does not show marked displeasure when we take an occasional rest. Nature has presented us with noses, yet we are scarcely called upon to cultivate the sense of smell to the

detriment of our other faculties, or to wander eternally from flower to flower, like some uneasy olfactory spirit. Nature has provided food, without, one may suppose, intending that life should be one long dinner. She has given "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions," without making the somewhat unreasonable demand that we shall spend our whole time in exercising each one of these powers to the exclusion of all the others. To infer that woman should devote herself solely to the cares of motherhood, on the mere ground that Nature has given her power to be a mother, is about as good logic as any of the above instances.

Nature clearly has indicated fatherhood to man as much as she has indicated motherhood to woman, and it is really difficult to see why a father should not be expected to devote himself wholly to domestic cares; that is, if we are so very determined that one sex or the other shall be sacrificed *en masse*. As an aid, moreover, to the selection of the victim-sex, we must consider the fact that the actual production of the race is performed by women. Therefore, they have done at least half the work, even if every other burden connected with the children be taken off their shoulders. So that if nothing but a burnt-offering will satisfy our yearning to decide other people's duties for them, that burnt-offering should clearly be man. Even *then* his burden would be light compared with that which woman has borne for centuries. The following articles strongly insist upon the injury that this age-long burden has inflicted on the bearers of the race, and they point out that it must be expiated by that race, for whose production this awful sacrifice has been enforced. We are now reaping the consequences of the wrong that has been done to our mothers and grandmothers, and the more closely one studies sociology and observes life, the more obvious it becomes that man is called upon to suffer, inch by inch and pang by pang, for that which he has inflicted.

The miseries and inherent indignity of the position allotted to women are, strange to say, brought out with extraordinary clearness by those writers who attempt, in a jocose manner, to represent the absurdity of the woman's claim by reversing the present relations of the sexes. The man, in these skits, is always a down-trodden, poor-spirited creature, overwhelmed with petty cares of that kind which, when undertaken by women, are described as holy, but when performed by men are deemed ridiculous. We find the husband watching over the infant in its interesting but somewhat agitating stages of teething, convulsions, vaccination, measles, while, at the same time, he takes care that the lady, who is engaged in public work, shall have excellent but economical dinners, a well-kept wardrobe, a thorough immunity from petty interruptions of all kinds, and that at the end of her well-spent day, she shall be greeted on the threshold of her home by a smiling helpmeet, arrayed in his best neck-tie and shirt-front, with moustaches arranged with that daintiness which his true man's nature has taught him never to neglect from the moment of his marriage. Disguising all signs of the day's long wrestle, this soothing creature adjusts himself to the other's mood, be it grave or gay.

Nor could the situation be rationally objected to by those men who have so often explained to their wives that nothing could be happier or holier. Do they not remember that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world"? Why then this masculine objection to rock the cradle? The average lot being, we are assured, the happiest in the end, no reasonable objection could be raised by man to a fate which holds out so *very* average a prospect. And then, as we are reminded, there are all the consolations of philosophy, the satisfaction of "doing one's duty in that state of life into which it shall please God to call us"—which is the reward of a docile following of this heaven-traced path.

In short, woman could scarcely find a more brilliant



advocate than the writer who proposes to himself to reduce her to absurdity.

There is another argument which I am assured weighs very seriously with a large number of people—viz., the argument based on the assumption that woman is, by inherent nature, physically weaker than man, and that therefore she is bound to accept whatever position man may assign to her. (I give the argument almost word for word as it was stated to me). But for sex-attraction, it is further urged, woman would “probably have been stamped out of existence, just as the ancient Britons succumbed to the stronger races that conquered them.” I will not stop to exhaustively enquire what would have been the fate of man and society generally, had man elected to “stamp woman out of existence.” In that case, there would probably have been no troublous problems to solve for either sex; no bitter wrongs to redress or pains to alleviate; so, perhaps, it is to be regretted that this stern measure was never carried out. Seeing, however, that mere exterminable feminine adjuncts are still permitted to move in human society, we have to recognise the fact that this compromise has been made with weakness, and to admit that, short of the universal extermination which was neglected by our ancestors, there is no way of effectually convincing the female sex, thus weakly spared, that they have not claims to rights and liberties, as members of the human family, claims which no amount of physical weakness can annihilate. Indeed, in a society with the smallest pretensions to civilisation, weakness ought rather to strengthen than to destroy those claims on the justice of the community.

It is interesting to note that this argument of brute force is generally brought in, late in the day, after more ornate reasonings have come rather to grief; and it strikes quaintly on the ear which has been surfeited with the familiar arguments based on sentiment, or

morality, or social expediency, or anything and everything except on might as distinct from right.

It would, indeed, clear the course satisfactorily if opponents of woman's liberties would frankly take their stand on this ground of brute force, rather than enlarge so much on the blessedness of woman's sphere, and her extraordinary heaven-implanted attachment to it, and all pertaining to it—especially its limitations. Why waste time in so many assurances of the charm of the "sphere" and the woman's delight in it, if what is really meant, in plain English, is: "You have got to take whatever sphere we are pleased to give you, seeing that our muscles are superior to yours. You may be thankful, in fact, that you are allowed a sphere at all in this world, since we might easily wipe you off the face of it, if we felt so inclined. We spare you because you possess for us a temporary allurements, and for thus permitting you to draw breath, you ought to draw it in perennial gratitude and obedience, and not to grumble at the size and structure of the cage that we have assigned to you—and a very pretty cage it is, with a charming compartment dedicated to the handsomest of you, who have pleased our fancy by your beauty and feminine charm: a tastefully, nay, luxuriously appointed compartment, with bars of the most expensive gilt, and provided at great expense; with an elegant transparent roof which permits the open sky to be seen, thus producing, in the happy inmates, a delightful illusion of being in the outer air. It is really childish and undignified—as every right-minded person is always telling you—to try to bend and fracture the thickly gilded bars of this charming domicile (made to order of the best materials), so that we are incessantly called off from important avocations to repair the injuries you so peevishly inflict."

This, then, is the argument which seriously influences the minds of many persons; an argument, therefore,