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1901

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# Woman

Kate Austin

1901

Is woman doomed by natural law to be the mental inferior of man? It is not strange that woman, with all a woman's admiration for the good qualities of her sex should answer that question with an emphatic No! And yet sad to say the attitude of society, of all laws and social regulations, besides the essays of many learned men, have all answered us emphatically in the affirmative. Centuries ago theologians even debated the question as to whether woman did not lack a soul as well as brains, and some of them admitted they could find no trace of woman's soul existing! They might have had better success had they been searching for brains. Doubtless you have all read the writings of Helen Gardner, one of the smartest women in the U.S. and who was complimented as having the best paper read before the World Congress of Women at Chicago during the Worlds Fair. In a lecture by Helen Gardner which I read about 10 years ago she told of a very learned man (I have forgotten the name) who had made a specialty of the study of the Human Brain. This gentleman had discovered that woman could never hope to be the mental equal of man because her brain lacked in quantity a certain substance that predominated in the brain of man, and from this he argued that woman was deemed

by nature to occupy an inferior position in comparison with man. Well, this great Professor passed away and was followed by another specialist on brains, and this one discovered a little more, and that this valuable substance his predecessor had thought of such importance to man in realm of intellect also predominated in the brains of very young children and idiots!! And then Helen Gardner — with all the impudence characteristic of her Sex — quaintly remarked that for her part she preferred quality to quantity, and if man wanted a quantity of that precious substance that predominated in the brain of an Idiot he was welcome to it.

Darwin the great Scientist was manifestly unjust to women. I will quote a few passages (bearing on the mental difference of the two Sexes) from “The Descent of Man.” “The chief distinction in the intellectual Powers of the two sexes is shown by man attaining a higher eminence in whatever he undertakes than can woman, whether requiring a deep thought, reason or imagination, or merely the rise of the Sense and Hands.” Also “if two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in all the arts and Sciences,” that “the list would not bear comparison and that if men are capable of a decided preeminence over women on many subjects, the average of mental power in man, must be above that of a woman.” Then Darwin goes on to say that “it is fortunate the father transmits mental endowment to both Sexes else man would have been as superior in mental endowment to woman as the Peacock is in ornamental plumage to the Pea hen.” (How very modest is man when weighting his abilities!) Further on Darwin makes a statement that has considerable bearing on woman’s status in Society. It is this: “Man being more Powerful in body and mind than woman, keeps her in a far more abject state of bondage in a savage state than does the male of any other animal,” and right there is the key to the whole mystery; the word Bondage explains it all, and it is surprising that a man like Darwin did not grasp the situation. But it is only one more example of the great fact that no one man can be infallible on all points however learned and great he may

But I see light shed as far as woman’s Political rights are concerned and was greatly consoled the other day by reading that in Miss. woman were allowed to vote on the stock law! How proud I felt to know that my Miss. Sisters are allowed to say whether it shall be “Hog up” or “Hog out”!!! In amazement I saw their rights extended until they might vote for school director or even county officers. Hope could go no further! For did not the reporter say that the women exercised the privilege so modestly and intelligently that in time the franchise might be extended? Of course, no one is surprised that a woman should act modestly. But when she adds the word ‘intelligently’ to her act, the world stands agape. We have been long taught that the two could not exist in woman, that if she acted with intelligence, modesty flew heavenward. That is, she dropped intelligent action, modesty again enfolded here. But I think it is my Privilege to say that it is high time my sex ceased to monopolize all the modesty and that man ceased to monopolize all the intelligence. It is time we had a fair division and I am quite sure a little modesty will not hurt the men. As for intelligence, my sex has already experimented with that ingredient, and found it like mother Eve’s forbidden fruit: Very Good.

the same effect. Woman even could not ride the Bicycle with any comfort for a time, so great was the ridicule and abuse heaped on her. The Preachers preached longwinded sermons, condemning it, and even doctors declared against the ill effects of the wheel. But woman persisted and won the day. She has learned long ago that she must trust her own judgment and not be guided wholly by authority, if she is to get any happiness out of life. But back to China as I mean to stick to my points, if I have any.

Now no one would be so foolish as to assert that the feet of Chinese woman were naturally deformed or inferior. We know that at birth the feet of the little baby girl were straight and beautiful like her brothers, but a cruel and artificial custom restrained the growth. Likewise it is just as foolish to assert that woman is mentally inferior to man, when it is plain to be seen her brain in a majority of cases receives the same treatment accorded the feet of Chinese girls. Common sense and observation confirm the fact of woman's equal brain development with that (of) man, when given an equal opportunity. Darwin even holds out a stand to confirm this, when he declares that if woman ever hopes to equal man or keep in sight she must take an active part in the struggle for existence.

Today we see the narrowing effects of custom. The Sons in a family are taught and urged to develop their business tact, to learn a trade, to become independent, to mingle freely in the world of business. The daughters in a family are kept under the authority of the parents 'til they pass under the authority of a husband. They are taught to make the most of their books and look out for a good catch, that is, a husband able to support them. A woman is never considered to be of age, and it is not good form for her to be without a protector of some kind. If she sows any wild oats, her inferior brain development is as palliation of the offence, and she gets the full wages of Sin while her copartner man with his superior mental endowments gets all the sympathy and is generally looked upon as having been led astray!!

be in all the arts and sciences. That grand woman Lucretia Mott said "let us take Truth for authority and not authority for Truth," and that is a bit of advice humanity needs to take to heart. Darwin made the mistake of taking authority for truth, for one authority admits in speaking of the difference of brain development of the two sexes that "more observations were needed on this point." All must admit that among the names in the Worlds' history of great writers, artists, and inventors, man leads the list in point of numbers but in quality there are not a few woman who stand on an equality with man. As a writer George Eliot — the able English woman — is one, and Wendell Phillips declared that the Brain of Harriet Martineau was worth that of 40,000 men. But what could or can one expect from a class that has been as what Darwin calls abject bondage. That way allowed none of the Privileges of school to speak except in the last 50 years. That were taught — from the cradle up — that the sole aim of woman's existence, as Dr. E. Brooks [?] quaintly puts it, was "to glorify man and serve him forever." Woman and man as well even today are the victims of laws and customs that originated ages ago in brute force among our savage ancestors that lived in caves and fought each other over the possession of a bone or a woman, man the strongest physically but not mentally enslaved the woman and by an exhibition of muscular Power wielded in the shape of clubs over weaker men, enslaved them also. The "law of might" came and fastened its hold on the Human race and curses Humanity to the present day.

Man gained a greater ascendancy over woman than his fellows through maternity. Motherhood became an active factor to keep woman in subserviency: A woman will bear anything for the sake of her children. The maternal instinct to stay with the young, to guard them from danger, to lay down even life itself is a great law of nature that no mother can resist. In that dark past woman had no choice to speak if she was the property of the strongest and always a beast of burden. But slowly the Human race [ ] on man gradually extended his powers in many ways but he never willingly let go of

any privilege; the government founded on physical force reached out to encircle the earth, the crafty, the cruel, the selfish always in the lead intellectual some of them were, but what is intellect when it has no sympathy with human kind, a monster from whom you can expect neither justice or mercy. Woman was a silent factor or if noisy condemned to the dunking stool, pillary or death.

When the art of Printing was discovered and it came into use, knowledge spread. Even the son of a serf might learn to read, and the daughter too sometimes. The spirit of liberty grew, and men began to treat women with more consideration and began to preach that it was the duty of a man to protect a woman. (Had they considered that woman was their mental equal they would not have done this). They called woman a frail and lonely flower, the angel of life, etc. There were some rebels among the woman — they declared it did not sweeten life any to be treated like a first class fool and then have heavenly names applied to their wounded self respect, and then they demanded justice in preference to protection. But they were called masculine, immodest and ostracized accordingly. But though it is possible to smother revolt you can never entirely extinguish it. And today the Rebels are boldly proclaiming by acts as well as words that they are the equal of man and that there is no sex in brain. Here it may not be out of place to quote from an article in the C[hicago] InterOcean from the Pen of Mary H. Krout, one of the brainiest American Newspapers we have now writing letters from London at the great University of London where woman stand on absolute equality with men and where exams are the most thorough and difficult of any in Europe. Women stood Higher than men and received proportionately a greater number of degrees. And the same story is told of schools in the U.S. The great trouble with my sex has been Bondage and lack of opportunity. We can see how man has been hampered in intellect by superstitions and the rule of his fellows. Woman's lot has been far worse for she has been the slave of a slave. Her Sphere is mapped out and from the cradle to the grave she is subjected to the scrutiny of Society, and the woman

today in some countries enjoys much liberty, it is not the same generous measure that is given her brother. Just a few months ago the first woman was granted the right to practice medicine in Austria and to get that privilege had to appeal in person to the Emperor, every authority below him having refused this gifted woman though she stood very high in all her examinations. Think of such bigotry will you, and the injustice of asserting that woman is mentally inferior to man in face of the fact that for ages man has usurped all privileges for himself. Why as late as 1849 in the U.S. Margaret Miller of Boston wrote her Plea for the higher education of woman, and so elegant were her words that it helped to open the doors of some schools for my sex. In China they take tender female children of 5 and 6 years and bind their feet to distort and stop the growth as a helpless dependent woman is considered the most attractive. In other lands they bind and cramp the brains of women beginning also at a very tender age because a tender dependent woman is considered the most attractive I suppose. For I was told the other day by an intelligent man, that a woman is as "next door to an angel, that they were made to be taken care of, and that it would demoralize them to go to the Polls and vote," also that "men didn't love independent women anyway." I've always noticed that the men that talk that way never feel hurt when the angel chops the wood, milks the cow, and builds the fire on a cold morning. He is not afraid of that sort of independence, but only of the kind that might question his authority to dictate the sphere of that angel. Isn't it queer that women can do the hardest kind of manual labor from picking cotton, taking in washing, or working in coal mines and not a protest is heard, but should she take it in her hand to study medicine, practice law, lecture or write woman's rights essays the whole masculine world (with a few noble exceptions) and the weak-minded feminine part also are convulsed. Wise old fossils write learned and ponderous papers on the subject. The Home is in danger: woman is unsexing herself, getting coarse and masculine and if she keeps on the world will go to the dogs and more rats to