

*The Women of Yesterday, Today
and Tomorrow.*

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Outline.

The Women of Yesterday.

The primitive woman.

Women in the Dark Ages and after.

The Women of Today.

Our grandmothers and mothers.

Their struggles, aims, etc.

Women of the present time.

Women in Europe and other lands.

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The ideal woman.

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The Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.

It is the aim of this production to treat of the past, present and future of "Earth's noblest thing," — a woman perfected, "or, in other words, of the women of yesterday, today and tomorrow. A careful study of the subject makes us exclaim with the poet: —

"O what makes woman lovely? virtue, faith,
and gentleness in suffering, — an endurance
Thru scorn or trial, — these call beauty forth,
Give it the stamp celestial, and admit it
To sisterhood with angels."

We shall find with Washington Irving, that, "There is in every true woman's heart a spark of heavenly fire, which beams and blazes in the dark hours of adversity."

According to the writers on primitive institutions, the position of married women was that of slavery or akin to it.

By this is meant not merely subjection to superior force, but also to legalized force. The subjugation of the weaker by the stronger is the story of all ages. Naturally, slavery was the result, and servitude for one side the outcome of all struggles. In the struggle for supremacy, "woman became property. Marriage, under the prevailing form, became the symbol of transfer of ownership. The passage from sexual service to manual service on the part of woman was perfectly natural. And thus we find the women of most savage tribes perform the manual and servile labor of the camp."

"When the struggle for existence was in its lowest and most brutal form, and man respected nothing but force, the disabled member of society, if man was disposed of by a stab or a blow; if woman, and valuable as a breeder of fresh fighters, simply reduced to slavery and passive obedience. A large proportion of the female infants were killed at birth. It was easier to capture women by force than to bring them up from infancy."

Women were chiefly valued as the producers of more fighters, and to do the work of those already born. She was made a beast of burden, and treated scarcely as well.

But the women of Egypt seem to have been an exception to this rule. Their position was equal to that of the husband. The queen sat on the throne with her husband; her statue rests in the tomb by his side. At all periods, the sister and the wife were held in the highest respect. The rights which were hers by birth were not absorbed in those of her husband, and she transmitted them intact to her children.

The condition of woman does not seem to have improved much until after the Dark Ages. The age of chivalry is counted the paradise of women. Chivalry was for the few, not the many. For the mass of women, there was still the utter degradation of a barbarous past, and the burden of grinding laws resulting from it.

After the age of chivalry and

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during Feudalism, the treatment of women sank back to its old level of servitude and degradation, from which they have been raised only by long and earnest effort of noble minded men and women.

During all this time, women were not educated. It was not thought necessary for them to have any education, and this idea has been held up to the present century, and I am sorry to say that it still holds in the minds of many.

To be sure, we have some women leaders of the people, but they were exceptions which only serve to prove the rule, and fasten more firmly the chains upon the rest of womankind. The world owes much to Catherine II. of Russia, Queen Elizabeth, Madame de Staël and others, who showed that women were fit for more than slaves.

Heroic and much enduring women we naturally think of in connection with the Revolutionary struggle, and in fact, from the very beginnings of the settlements in America. We hear much of the Pilgrim Fathers, but hardly a word of the Pilgrim Mothers. But if we look into the matter

very carefully, we shall see that they helped as much in building up the country as did our forefathers. They helped to build the houses by sawing logs, and carrying water for the mortar, besides doing the cooking and other necessary work.

"In addition to her lighter accomplishments, the Colonial lady was an excellent housekeeper, in days when housekeeping meant having everything prepared under the supervision of the mistress of the home, from the cutting up of the pork and beef until the culminating moment when the sausages and mince pies appeared upon the table". The spinning and weaving, the making of garments was also done at home. To be sure, the wealthier ladies had help in this, and wore silks; but in the majority of households all this work had to be done by the women.

"Very little from books was thought necessary for a girl. She was trained to domestic matters, however; she must learn the accomplishments of the day, to play upon the harpsichord or

spirit, and to work impossible dragons and roses on canvas. She was also taught to dance, except in the homes of the Puritans and Quakers.

Probably it was the varied and never-ending work of the New England woman which caused the following remark in a graduating essay, "A woman's work, grave sirs, is never done."

It was during this age when so many things were needed and so little was had to do with that our great inventors were born. We find the cause in the fact that their mothers had the inventive talent for makeshifts. "Necessity was the mother of invention" with them.

The condition of women in this country has steadily improved from the time of the Colonists up to the present time, tho the effect was not very marked until about a generation or so ago. Since then, they have entered nearly all the occupations and their wages are steadily improving. At first, they were given only the merest pittance, and

even now they do not receive as much as man for doing the same work.

The doors of the educational institutions have been opened to her, and we find her carrying off just as high honors as her brothers.

In religious work we find her doing more than men. We also find more women than men belonging to the churches. The church had fallen into a rut, from which it is being lifted by the steady earnest work of the young men and women of today.

Probably woman has done more for the temperance cause than any other factor. It is quite certain that Frances E. Willard has done more for it than any other woman.

Someone in speaking of the position of women in America, says, "In America, woman holds a more exalted position than in any other nation. There exists more delicacy toward the sex. This fact is acknowledged by foreign visitors. Her more effectual

influence is exerted in domestic life. Her moral position is superior to any other nation, and her religious influence is ^{one} of the most ennobling characteristics. Her physical condition is not as good as in other countries, but probably the primary cause is climate." It has been said that American Colleges are doing much to improve the health of our women by introducing to their notice the benefit and necessity of physical culture.

The position of women in England is nearly as high as in America. It has been said that the English woman lived for the benefit of her husband and home, but that it was the reverse in America.

In France, woman does not gain her liberty until after marriage. The English woman loses hers then, but the American woman keeps hers all the time. The women of France are good business managers. Before the French Revolution, they were renowned as

being brilliant and witty, but they have lost this characteristic to some extent.

"In no country in Europe, except Turkey, is the general condition of woman so degraded as in Germany, and in no country does she acquiesce so tamely in her degradation. A woman is not regarded as an equal and companion but a mere housekeeper and producer of children. Among the peasant classes, she is treated merely as a beast of burden. There is no society among the upper class, in the way we understand the term. That the degradation of woman involves the brutalizing of man is nowhere more apparent than in Germany."

In Africa, in some of the tribes, women have all the work to do, and are virtually slaves. If there is any carrying or moving to be done, women are used as the beasts of burden. In other tribes, men and women work together as equals. Sometimes the wives or sisters of a chief exert the principal

influence over him. Among most of the tribes, polygamy adds to their degradation.

In regard to Morocco, someone says, "Holding its women in subjection, the Moorish nation is itself held in subjection morally, politically, and socially. Every man's hand is against each other, and all men are against the women. The girls are not taught to read. The one ideal held before her is marriage, and of marriage the least noble side. Religion is all but denied them in practice." This country well illustrates the fact that no nation can rise above its weaker sex.

In Asia, the position of women is that of degradation and slavery. Very seldom do we find them treated as equals, but more often as slaves.

The childhood of the girls of India is very pleasant, being one long play-time, but after marriage comes the misery. They are betrothed when very young. After marriage, they are taken to their husband's home. Unlike the American, the bride begins at the bottom of the ladder, instead of the top.

The oldest woman in the harem controls all those under her, and to the bride falls all the hard drudgery. She is never allowed to speak to her father-in-law, and seldom to her husband's brothers. If her first born is a son, she is raised somewhat in the estimation of the others. If she should be left a widow, she often finds it preferable to throw herself upon the funeral pyre to living the life she would have to.

"Nowhere under the sun has any nation accorded to its women more absolute freedom, such entire command of their lives and property, as have the Burmese women. They stand in every way on an absolute equality with men as far as law, as religion, and as custom are concerned." The Burmese women would probably not be considered good-looking according to our standard of good looks, because they have large waists and wear only a jacket and short skirt—but they have a good, healthy, happy and contented look. The girls all learn to do housework, and it is their peculiar duty to bring the water from

the village well morning and evening. This is their gossiping place. They indulge in no games, but seem perfectly well contented.

The Japanese women also rank well in the scale of civilization. Where the Christian religion has been taught to the Japanese people, we find the women treated almost as equals. They are bright, happy and amiable ^{and} are good housekeepers. They are noted for their taste in arranging flowers, and their skill in making and serving tea.

The women of tomorrow will partake of the nature of the New Woman and the Old Woman combined. She will possess the good traits of both.

The first and prime requisite is good health, and it will be her duty and pleasure to keep it so by judicious exercise, and proper food and clothing. Her dress will be such as is conducive to health, being hygienic, combining utility and beauty. By hygienic is not meant slouchiness or untidy, as is so generally the case with those who think they are hygienically

dressed. By it is meant neatness, trimness, and simplicity, thereby gaining beauty, without which no true woman should be content.

She will have a thorough education fitting her for her duties as mother of the generations to come. This education will include a course in Domestic Economy with a liberal knowledge of medicine and nursing besides.

Above all else, she will have a thorough knowledge of her duties and privileges before she enters the marriage relation, thus avoiding many of the miseries, and temptation of those who do not have such knowledge.

The future woman will have a thorough understanding of her duty toward other women, and will do it cheerfully and willingly. Necessarily, with this will come a greater feeling of charity than is now possessed by most women. She will be the type of women of whom Wordsworth speaks,

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort and command.