



752513485/

Hogarth Essays

Second Series

24941
f. 31.

LEISURED WOMEN

THE HOGARTH ESSAYS

Second Series

- I. COMPOSITION AS EXPLANATION
By GERTRUDE STEIN. 3s. 6d.

- II. ROCHESTER.
By BONAMY DOBRÉE. 2s. 6d.

- III. IMPENETRABILITY.
By ROBERT GRAVES. 2s. 6d.

- IV. CATCHWORDS AND CLAPTRAP.
By ROSE MACAULAY. 2s.

- V. HUNTING THE Highbrow.
By LEONARD WOOLF. 2s. 6d.

- VI. THE NATURE OF BEAUTY IN ART AND LITERATURE.
By CHARLES MAURON. 3s. 6d.

- VII. THE APOLOGY OF ARTHUR RIMBAUD.
By EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST. 2s. 6d.

- VIII. THE PROSPECTS OF LITERATURE.
By LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH. 1s. 6d.

- IX. POSTERITY.
By STEPHEN KING-HALL. 2s. 6d.

- X. CONTEMPORARY MUSIC.
By ROBERT H. HULL. 2s.

- XI. LEISURED WOMEN.
By VISCOUNTESS RHONDDA. 2s.

LEISURED WOMEN

VISCOUNTESS RHONDDA



*Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at The
Hogarth Press, 52 Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1*

1928



NOTE

The material on which this essay
is based first appeared as articles
in *Time and Tide*, under the
pseudonym "Candida."

Printed in Great Britain by
NEILL & CO., LTD., EDINBURGH.



LEISURED WOMEN

IT is close on sixty years since John Stuart Mill first pointed to the fact that the unemancipated woman was a danger to the community. It is, he wrote, “to be considered that all the education which women receive from society inculcates in them the feeling that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty—the only ones whose interest they are called upon to care for; while, as far as education is concerned, they are left strangers even to the elementary ideas which are presupposed in any intelligent regard for larger interests or higher moral objects. The complaint against them resolves itself merely

LEISURED WOMEN

into this, that they fulfil only too faithfully the sole duty which they are taught, and almost the only one which they are permitted to practise." Yet it is open to question whether women do not constitute a far greater danger to the community in these days of pseudo-equality of the sexes than they did when *The Subjection of Women* was written.

It may be worth while considering for a moment some of the changes which have taken place since that date. In 1870 it is probably true to say that not one girl in ten thousand was as well educated as her brother. Amongst those sections of the community which could afford to send their children to anything further than the pre-Education Act equivalents of the elementary schools of to-day, there was hardly a parent who even so much as contemplated attempting to educate his girls

LEISURED WOMEN

as well as his boys. If he had thought of doing such a thing he would immediately have come up against the difficulty that scarcely a girls' school existed which attempted to give more than a slight educational polish. But the lack was not felt, because the ordinary parent did not attempt to educate his girls. As for the universities, there was not one which was completely open to girls in 1870, and there were scarcely any which allowed them even the most inadequate, grudging, and precariously held facilities.

Women in those days were in general regarded as inferior beings, they were not far removed from a privileged slave class. The vast majority of women were almost totally uneducated, carefully trained to think personally, never impersonally, and always and only of their own and their families' immediate interests. In any section of society

LEISURED WOMEN

that could by hook or crook afford it, they were trained also to find contentment in a life of perfectly useless leisure. And it is, of course, true that, as John Stuart Mill says, women did, almost invariably, throw their influence, such as it was, on to the side of private advantage rather than public interest: "She is taught that she has no business with things out of that (the private) sphere; and, accordingly, she seldom has any honest and conscientious opinion on them; and therefore hardly ever meddles with them for any legitimate purpose, but generally for an interested one. She neither knows nor cares which is the right side in politics, but she knows what will bring in money or invitations, give her husband a title, her son a place, or her daughter a good marriage." But it is also true that the men who did in fact constitute the active thinking portion of the com-

LEISURED WOMEN

munity were carefully trained not to take the woman's point of view seriously. A man might be, doubtless often was, influenced by his wife or his other female dependants, but, if he was, he regarded it as a weakness and one of which he was considerably ashamed. He was perfectly well aware that, as an educated human being with a definite place in society and a definite social conscience, he was falling below his duty if he allowed himself to be swayed by a creature not merely uneducated but actually perversely educated; carefully trained on most points to have no social conscience or ethical standard so far as the community as a whole was concerned, and possessed of that leisure which breeds decay—and, usually, he was perfectly right.

In fact, sixty years ago, the influence of women, so far as they had any influence, might be almost entirely to the

LEISURED WOMEN

bad, but on the political and social life of the community, on public opinion generally, their influence was practically *nil*, since they had, for the most part, no means of influencing these things, no knowledge of how they worked, and little knowledge of life. Even their influence on the individuals who composed the thinking community was very small, since they were carefully trained to believe men knew best, to place no reliance on their own opinion, and to give in to their husbands and fathers; whilst men were equally carefully trained to suppose that women were creatures of an inferior order, to be influenced by whom was beneath their dignity, and to give in to whom was humiliating. The women might—and probably, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, did—put their home before their country, their husband's pecuniary and social advancement before his pro-

LEISURED WOMEN

fessional honour or his desire to contribute useful work to his generation, their own children's comfort before other children's health, and their own family luxuries before other people's necessities. They might be—and probably usually were—entirely lacking in any sense of the service they owed to the community. They might, and in view of their education and training probably usually did, take the short-sighted view as against the long-sighted view, the personal view as against the impersonal, the biased view as against the just, the irresponsible as against the responsible. They might, and usually did, exaggerate the importance of their little finger-aches and their headaches; and allow their various minor ailments to bulk large in their minds and to stand in the way of any efficiency they might be capable of. They might for lack of education and

LEISURED WOMEN

occupation (or rather actually because of their education, since they were regarded as more attractive if highly sexed) devote an altogether undue proportion of their time, conversation, and attention to consideration of matters appertaining—if not openly, at least covertly—to sex and sexual emotions: to personal adornment and exposure with a view to rousing sex emotion in men, to discussing and considering, and glorying in sexual attraction (which they politely called love), to dwelling upon and over-stressing the importance of attributes concerned, directly or indirectly, with the sexual side of life, as, for instance, physical beauty in the young, virginity, and chastity. They might do all these things, and they might do a considerable amount of harm to social life thereby, but the harm they could do was limited because their influence was limited, and they them-

LEISURED WOMEN

selves did not believe that the view of life which was all that their one-sided training and their seclusion allowed them to be capable of was the best possible. In 1870 their direct effect on national policy, on public opinion, on the public life of the nation, on affairs of public interest, was about as much as that of the dogs or horses of the country. Their indirect influence was, of course, even then, a very different matter, since they brought up the children—and, even though these (both boys and girls) were early implicitly taught to despise their mother's opinions, still their attitude towards life was largely framed in the nursery.

During the last fifty years two far-reaching changes have occurred. In the first place, the size of the families of the professional and well-to-do classes has dwindled until, whereas in 1870 the average number of children to a family

LEISURED WOMEN

was probably round about six or seven, it is to-day more like two or three. In the second place, women in these same classes instinctively recognising, as Olive Schreiner pointed out, that they must revolt against a condition which had become dangerous alike to themselves and to the race to which they belonged, have risen and demanded more and more education, more and more opportunities for professional and commercial work, and more and more say in the social and political life of the country. As a result of the agitation of an active minority, women are now partly enfranchised, they are eligible for certain posts in public life; therefore, says public opinion, women count and must be listened to with respect.

In 1870 there were not more than three or four schools providing a good secondary curriculum in the whole kingdom. (The best known of these

LEISURED WOMEN

were the North London Collegiate School, founded in 1850, and Cheltenham Ladies' College, founded in 1853.) In 1925 there were something like 1500 secondary girls' schools recognised by the Board of Education, containing an aggregate of over 200,000 pupils.

In 1870 the number of girls being educated up to matriculation standard was probably about thirty. In 1925 the numbers were, at a conservative estimate, round about 20,000.

In 1870 there was only one woman's college (in the sense in which we understand the word to-day) in existence—Girton College (founded at Hitchin in 1869 and transferred to Cambridge in 1873). At Girton there were in 1870 five students. Doubtless there were in addition to the Girton students a few individuals taking University courses, but if we put the total number throughout the country at thirty, we are

LEISURED WOMEN

probably above the mark. In 1925 there were 14,000 women taking University degree and diploma courses.

In 1870 there was scarcely a woman in an office. In 1925 there were over half a million.

In 1870 there was only one medical woman in the country (and she had taken her degree abroad). In 1925 there was something like 1300.

In 1870 there was scarcely a woman teacher in anything but a private school. According to the 1921 census there were 187,352 women teachers in the country.

Before 1870 no woman had either the parliamentary or the municipal vote, nor was any woman eligible for Parliament or for any municipal or local body. In 1925 women had the municipal vote on the same terms as men and more than three-fifths of the adult women of the country had the parliamentary vote,

LEISURED WOMEN

whilst women were eligible for one of the Houses of Parliament.

In 1870, with the exception of Harriet Martineau, we can find no record of any woman on the permanent staff of a paper. In 1925 scarcely a paper but had one woman, and probably more, on its permanent staff.

In 1870 no married woman owned any property. In 1925 a married woman was not very differently treated by the law in respect to property from any other person.

In 1870 the divorce laws differed as between men and women. In 1925 they were equal.

So far so good. During the latter half of the nineteenth century women—some women—recognised that they were becoming a danger to the community; they made a big effort, and they set in progress one of the biggest changes the world has known for many centuries.

LEISURED WOMEN

The change of opinion which has followed on these changes of habit and customs, or rather, perhaps, the change of opinion which has followed on the agitation which was necessary to bring these changes about, is an enormous one, an almost revolutionary one. In public life we see it clearly enough. The parliamentary candidate appeals to both men and women and spends anxious hours trying to decide what is likely to attract the woman voter. On almost every governing body there sit to-day two or three women. It is no uncommon thing in local government to find a woman mayor. Women, whose mothers fifty years ago would have thought it immodest to open a bazaar, are prepared to-day to address public gatherings of any size. Meetings of women are frequent. Cabinet Ministers are ready to receive deputations of women—nay, more, we have to-day a

LEISURED WOMEN

woman Minister of the Crown. Of the 206,000 teachers in our elementary schools, whose influence on the future of the nation it would be almost impossible to overestimate, some 130,000 are women. Of the 17,000 teachers in the secondary schools, more than 9000 are women. In political life, in the press, in the schools, women are—if still reluctantly—being listened to, are being taken semi-seriously.

But there is another new place where they are being listened to, listened to both on public affairs and on the ordering and arranging of the individual family life. They are being listened to in the home. Whereas in 1870 the man who consciously allowed himself to be guided by his wife, either in matters of public opinion or in respect to decisions of grave importance about his own career and the family affairs generally, felt ashamed of himself; to-day it is

LEISURED WOMEN

the man who disregards his wife's views who feels a little ashamed of himself. In respect to the children the change is even more marked. In 1870 "father knew best"; mother, in so far as she governed, governed as a vice-regent, as father's deputy. To-day, even where the older children are concerned, mother's vote is tending more and more to become the casting vote. At bottom, both in father's and mother's mind, there is a growing feeling that the children are somehow a bit more mother's than father's—that she ought to have the leading voice in decisions appertaining to them.

To sum up, women are to-day taking a certain, though still very small, share in forming public opinion outside the home—they are taking a larger share in helping to form opinion on public affairs inside the home; and they are beginning to take the largest share in deciding the

LEISURED WOMEN

actual family arrangements inside the home. But it is worth noting that this change has come about not through any noticeable alteration in the training, lives, or habits of thought of the vast majority of women of the leisured classes, which remain in many ways very much what they were in 1870. It has come about simply through a change in public opinion. This change has been produced partly by the agitation of an active minority of intellectual, educated, and hard-working women; partly by that acceptance of the *fait accompli* which is always so marked a characteristic of British public opinion; partly by the recognition of good work done by individual outstanding women in various fields of labour. Because Madame Curie discovered radium, because Miss Royden can preach a more eloquent sermon than the average bishop, because Dame Louisa Aldrich

LEISURED WOMEN

Blake was one of the best surgeons of her day, the ordinary man is inclined to take the opinion of the ordinary woman more seriously than he was sixty years ago.

But the average "leisured" woman has not altered very greatly. She is perceptibly better educated, so far as actual book-learning is concerned, than she was sixty years ago. Even at the worst of the private schools that is true. She plays games, and sometimes plays them well. But apart from these two points—important, certainly, so far as they go—she has changed but little. Her *general* education (as apart from the strictly book-learning side) still tends to make the little girl regard herself, not as an embryo citizen whose aim is to become an entirely responsible, self-governing, and independent human being, to whom will be entrusted her share of voice and influence in the

LEISURED WOMEN

governing of the community to which she belongs, her share of responsibility for the public weal; but rather as a future helpmeet, one whose business with the state and the world outside the home will be indirect rather than direct, one whose business it will be not to act herself but only to help others to act. She is encouraged not to have overmuch self-confidence, she is induced to regard herself as something slightly inferior. It is not an unknown thing to hear the headmistress of one of our great public schools for girls speak of her school as "only a girls' school"; and this attitude is the common one amongst the headmistresses of the private schools to which the majority of the girls of well-to-do parents, who leave the home and the local high school, are still sent. The schoolgirl is still encouraged to regard herself as something which cannot take care of itself by itself,

LEISURED WOMEN

as something to be guarded and protected. A headmistress was recently asked to allow one of her charges who was with her for the holidays, a girl close on eighteen years of age, to dance with some of the other passengers during a pleasure cruise on board ship. Her reply (made in front of the girl) to the two friendly and quite respectable young men who had been sent to proffer the request, was that just for once she might, if they would promise "to treat her as you would your own sister." How, insensibly, must such an attitude of mind penetrate into every chink and cranny of the school life.

It is true that the public schools are better in these respects—a great deal better—than the private schools, and that to-day the best of the high schools are, in some ways at least, better than many of the public schools. The women who were responsible for origin-

LEISURED WOMEN

ating public schools for girls were amongst the finest people of their generation—they stood whole-heartedly for the full responsibility of the individual, and it is to them that is due the whole conception of the possibility of an education that should make our girls independent, free-spirited, courageous, responsible citizens. The country owes a debt to such women as Miss Beale, Dame Louisa Lumsden, and Miss Dove, which it may be that posterity will recognise. Their influence extended not merely to the public schools which they made, but to every girls' school in the country. The very worst private school of to-day (and it is pretty bad) is a better place than its counterpart of sixty years ago, and a different place to what it would have been were it not for the work of such women as Dame Louisa Lumsden and Miss Beale. But these were giants. They raised a torch

LEISURED WOMEN

which it has not always been easy for the women who have followed them to carry with the same success. In their day the private schools copied the public schools—are there not to-day signs that certain of the public schools, tired perhaps of leading the way, are showing a tendency to take their tone from the private schools? But, however that may be, it is, after all, to the private schools that the majority of girls who leave home are still sent, and it is, therefore, the girls educated at private schools who set the tone for the behaviour of women of the leisured classes.

The schoolgirl of to-day is allowed to suppose that, providing her father has enough money to keep her, she will be doing nothing wrong, when she leaves school, if she does what would be regarded as the last disgrace if her brother did it—if (in the hope of mar-

LEISURED WOMEN

riage) she lives at home idle. Nay, more than that, she is, in the average private school, implicitly if not explicitly, taught that she will actually be doing wrong if she insists on going out to work against her parents' desire, and that her duty is to try to adapt herself to the conditions of her home life, to learn to potter about, to learn to do nothing; contentedly to accept her condition as a "kept" human being as part of doing her duty in that station of life unto which it has pleased God to call her.

The young woman is taught, explicitly, to place a high importance on dress. She is taught, implicitly, to think a great deal about her health and her minor ailments. Is it surprising that she emerges from her school career with a sense that she is not a fully responsible human being; that she is lacking in self-confidence, lacking in

LEISURED WOMEN

sense of responsibility outside the home; that she has a conviction, if she happens to be conscientious, that it is her duty to put her family and her family ties before her duty to her country or to the community? Is it surprising if she is assured that there is little need to think or to read for herself, that she need not trouble to make up her own mind but can safely accept other people's opinions; if she is not ashamed of showing lack of self-control, of giving way to fear, either physical or moral, if she happens to feel it; if she is, in fact, without any real standard of self-respect, of self-dependence? Is it wonderful that, with this education as a foundation, after a year or two of idle uselessness in the home (that idleness which of all evil influences has the most corroding effect upon character) she becomes very much the same kind of creature

LEISURED WOMEN

that the leisured girl of 1870 became; overestimates the sexual side of life—since sex appears to be her sole *raison d'être*—spends half her time thinking about her clothes, regards herself as an inferior kind of creature who is not of sufficient importance in the scheme of things for it to matter if she spends her time amusing herself, and develops all those faults that the life she is leading almost invariably brings out. A girl was once asked why she spent a fine afternoon playing bridge. "I would rather wear out than rust out," she replied.

Shall we be told that this type only exists among a small section of the very rich, amongst what used to be called the "Smart Set," and that there are so few of them that it does not matter? There is a "Smart Set" or its equivalent in every suburb and in every provincial town in England, a set which spends its time playing bridge in the

LEISURED WOMEN

afternoons, motoring round to see its friends, plays a little tennis, dances a good deal, keeps the most fashionable kind of dog it can afford, spends a large proportion of its time—and more of its husband's or father's money than he can easily spare—at its dressmaker, spends all it can squeeze on jewellery. This public reads a large number of novels. It only glances at the papers; its interest in home politics is, for the most part, confined to thinking how wicked the working-man is to want the money and material comforts which it regards itself as all-important; its interest in foreign politics is non-existent. This public is a much larger one than it was sixty years ago and it is a much more serious menace to society. Sixty years ago the man, his interests, and his amusements came so far first in the home that, by the time he had spent all he needed on sport and entertaining his

LEISURED WOMEN

friends, there was not a great deal left for spending on his wife's and daughter's dressing, dancing, and entertaining of their friends. Sixty years ago when a woman married she normally embarked on a period of some fifteen to twenty years during which she gave birth to a child at least every two or three years, and a young family of seven or eight children does not, except possibly in the richest class of all, leave a mother much leisure.

Idleness, the idleness that breeds decay, was, sixty years ago, confined to the unmarried or to the middle-aged. To-day, when a woman marries she has, perhaps, two children. That is not, even amongst moderately well-to-do people, a whole-time job, unless she chooses to make it so. After the first few years, in these days of school education, it is not even a half-time job. There are many mothers of small

LEISURED WOMEN

families who do not see their children, when they are in the nursery, for more than two or three hours in the twenty-four—and when they are a little older only see them during three months in the year, who do not do their own house-work, but who (because they have been brought up to know no better) make the children and the home they do *not* bear the brunt of looking after into an excuse for doing nothing else. It is not to be supposed that these mothers do not love their children devotedly—of course they do. It is rare to find a mother who can help doing that. But loving does not in itself constitute an occupation. Sixty years ago women of this kind had very little freedom, to-day they have a great deal. If people are to be brought up to live the life of self-indulgent slaves it is safer for the community that they should actually be slaves.

LEISURED WOMEN

But it is not only the number of idle, useless women which has increased enormously during the past sixty years; their influence also has increased. To-day they are listened to, they help to set the tone of the society in which they move. They, largely, make the attitude towards life of big sections (and important sections) of the community. And they make it what they have been brought up to make it. They put idleness, the one thing they know, as the highest good; they teach the men and the young women of their set to value idleness, to dislike work, to value material comfort, personal adornment, and social advancement, to judge people upon how they dress, and by whom—socially—they know; and since sex is their profession, they put an enormous emphasis on sex, on discussion of sex, on consideration of “sex problems,” on the importance of sexual attraction, on

LEISURED WOMEN

the methods of keeping feverish sexual desire. They are much franker about this side of life than they were sixty years ago, because they are freer, and, since they owe what position they have entirely to sex, they naturally set enormous store by it. When they discuss sex questions they are discussing professional questions. They set no standards of duty towards the community, because, for the most part, they have none. Their influence is, as Mill declared it was sixty years ago, "anything but favourable to public virtue." They understand the danger to the community involved in war and they have a standard of duty to the community in war time, but, short of war, their motto is home first, community last, and they spread that attitude of mind throughout their set. They are listened to to-day by men as they were not sixty years ago, and there

LEISURED WOMEN

is grave danger that their unhealthy, immoral, and corroding attitude towards life may spread through the community.

But if the effect of the social system of to-day on the most useless type of woman is deplorable, and if the type of society for whose existence she is mainly responsible exists, as it certainly does, not merely in Mayfair but in every suburb in England, she is in fact, prevalent as she is, not the most characteristic type of young English woman. The majority of normal young women instinctively reject the bridge-party ideal of life. But that is not to say that the present education of women, the present attitude towards women, leaves them unaffected. They are taught from their cradles, in their homes, in their schools, that they are different from men, that their first duty is not to the community but to the home, that,

LEISURED WOMEN

above all, their function in life is to become mothers, that the one sacred thing in life is the maternal instinct. No one ever teaches them that the maternal instinct unregulated and unsublimated can be just as dangerous, just as anti-social, and just as non-moral as any other untaught and unregulated instinct. They are taught to mistrust—as well as to emphasise—their sex instinct; but they are taught that the maternal instinct needs no mistrusting, no pruning, no directing, and that nothing should be allowed to stand against it. They grow up and they marry; they have children, and their natural instinct, that instinct which everyone about them has taught them to regard as sacred, immediately tells them to sacrifice everything and everyone to their children.

Sixty years ago they would probably have been saddled with a husband who

LEISURED WOMEN

considered that he, his comfort, his career, his service to his generation, should stand before the children. To-day the husband is, on the whole, inclined to agree with them that the children should come first, before his comfort, before his career, before his duty to the community—he also has been brought up to revere the sacred maternal instinct. But that is not all. The instinct that was meant to go round a large family, that sixty years ago was, so to speak, spread thin amongst seven, eight, or ten children, is to-day concentrated on the two, or at most three, which is usually all that the average not too well-to-do young couple feel justified in having.

If the mother is conscientious, the children are probably well brought up in the sense that they are taught kindness, good manners, friendliness, truthfulness, and all the other usual English

LEISURED WOMEN

virtues, but they are allowed to know from their very earliest childhood that the whole world, so far as their parents are concerned, is centring in them, that the best is always kept for them. Their mother cannot bear to see them enduring the faintest shadow of discomfort or foregoing the least chance of a treat; if she had a dozen children and a husband who insisted on being put first of the lot, she would have to bear it quite often; but she has a husband who is prepared to aid and abet her, and so few children that each can usually be given its heart's desire. She does not mean to spoil them, in one sense perhaps she does not, but she lets them know that they come first, she saves them every jar, she sees that they get better food than anyone else in the house, she gives them rather more treats than the family income can afford, and if it comes to a question between their interests and

LEISURED WOMEN

the husband's career, as it quite often does, it is his career that goes: the family comes first, the home comes before the community, and the children are brought up to expect that that should be so. The idea that she, the mother, has any serious duty in life apart from her children never even occurs to the average married woman. That the very fact that her duty to her children is the highest duty she knows must prevent her from doing that duty as it should be done, never occurs to her either. She is convinced that she is doing her full duty to the community through the home, by bringing up her children. The idea that she is actually bringing up the children badly because she is doing that and nothing else, that she is not justified in giving full reign to that sacred maternal instinct of hers along the path of least resistance, never enters her head. Along with the

LEISURED WOMEN

deepest sense of responsibility towards her children, she carries a sense of comparative irresponsibility towards anything beyond her children, and to-day she is beginning to imbue her husband and her children with her own attitude towards life.

The effect on the children and young people of to-day is obvious enough. Because their mothers have not yet developed a social conscience as apart from a maternal conscience, and are giving them the attention and spoiling meant for a family three times their size, they are growing up soft, expecting the best as of right, imagining that they are ends in themselves, and have a right to look upon the world as a place out of which to snatch the greatest possible happiness and amusement and material prosperity and comfort for themselves. The best thing they find to do, even when they happen to be altruistic, is to

LEISURED WOMEN

try to give others the same life as themselves, and to suppose that the endeavour of the whole world should be to see that everyone in it has, as a right, amusement, happiness, and material comfort.

“The greatest happiness of the greatest number” is a soft ideal, the ideal of an age that is losing its ideals. And this lack of idealism, this debasing of ideals of conduct, both for private and public life, comes, in the first place, from the women: from them because to-day they have influence—at least in the home—and yet are not trained to use that influence wisely, are not trained to have a sense of responsibility to the community, because they are trained to think of themselves as something a trifle inferior, not to regard themselves as directly responsible citizens; and are not treated either by the State or in the home as fully responsible people from whom the best

LEISURED WOMEN

in courage, self-reliance, and service may be demanded. At its worst this attitude towards women leads to a glorification of idleness and the vices that attend on idleness, at its best to a putting of the duty towards home and children before the duty to the community.

In addition to the bridge-playing women of Suburbia and the conscientious mothers there is, however, another type: the young public school and university women, the increasing number of women who go into a profession. It remains to be considered how the present attitude towards women affects them.

Of course the general softness induced by over-spoiling is there. Apart from that, in the public school to-day—as in the secondary school, as in the private school—they are taught that they are of secondary, indirect import-

LEISURED WOMEN

ance, their school is "only a girls' school"; and not so much courage or endurance is expected of them as it is of boys. They are more cosseted than are their brothers, they are allowed to place their minor ailments before their play and before their work. They are taught, usually implicitly but occasionally explicitly, to believe that women's work is inferior in quality to men's, that less need be expected of them. They are taught not to rely on themselves but to turn to men for care, protection, and advice, and to think that—apart from motherhood—men's work matters more than women's, and that the highest ideal for a woman is not to embrace a profession or engage in paid work but to do some kind of unpaid work (probably slumming) for charity. If, in spite of all these tacit discouragements, they decide to go through a university and embrace a profession, what becomes

LEISURED WOMEN

of them? As a rule, unless they adopt so exacting a profession that they are cured of the faults of their training, their tendency is, wherever possible, to do as they have been taught to do, to put their health and their home before their work. Trouble or illness at home, even when not serious, is regarded as an all-sufficient reason for the breaking of any professional engagement—home ties, even though the young women concerned are not yet responsible for their homes, come first. Their own health is apt to come a good second.

Apart from these very serious disabilities, their attitude towards life is what might be expected from their upbringing whether at home, at school, or at the average university. They care for their own work, often passionately, they have had to battle hard for the right to do it against many insidious foes; but they have not much self-

LEISURED WOMEN

confidence even in their own work, so that it is unlikely that many of them can ever, except when here and there genius, which nothing trammels, breaks through, do really well in it; and in other relations of life they have amazingly little self-confidence. How can they trust themselves when they have been taught to trust no woman?

They pride themselves frequently enough on not thinking very much of women or of women's achievements. They pride themselves on not being feminists. They think it shows intellectual freedom and lack of bias to recognise that women are inferior, and, except for a few outstanding exceptions, will never really make good—what it really shows is that they are true to the traditions of their training, and that they have their fair share of sex-snobbery: that is, a desire to stand in with, and to stand well with, the

LEISURED WOMEN

stronger sex. They have, for the most part, no sense of loyalty to the women who struggled through the years of the nineteenth century to get for them the advantages and the privileges of which they are now availing themselves. It has not been part of their heritage, either in their homes or in their schools, to learn at what cost the advantages they enjoy were won. They treat their privileges of education and training as if they had dropped like manna from heaven, and it never occurs to them that the acceptance of those privileges ought to involve loyalty to the movement that won them—how should it? No one has ever put that point of view before them.

The majority of those who adopt a profession still drift into teaching. Not in most cases from any sense of vocation, but because teaching is still the obvious thing for an educated woman

LEISURED WOMEN

to do, still one of the professions in which she believes that she may be moderately sure of gaining a certain competency, and because teaching requires a less expensive post-graduate period of training, apprenticeship, or waiting for success than do most other professions.

What effect does the home and school training we have described have on the young woman who in her turn goes back to teaching? She has been taught always, both implicitly and explicitly, that only in the field of sex can she gain complete victory. It is true that she knows that some women have found success and happiness in other fields, but their success has never been brought very prominently before her. Successful men she has known and been taught to regard with hero-worship; successful women—very few. It is the men who have occupied the head-lines in the

LEISURED WOMEN

papers—it is the men in every capacity of life who have counted. She has been taught that as a human being a woman is inferior to a man; that her one great value to the community lies in her capacity for motherhood; that there lies her one chance of escaping a sense of inferiority and of failure. When she takes up teaching she believes herself to be risking her chance of marriage —it will mean seeing so few men—and, to her, marriage is the one word that spells complete success. Naturally enough she tends to become discontented. She is an intelligent young woman, she has read the modern psychologists, she is as frank with herself as she knows how to be, and she explains her discontent to herself with all the courage and cocksureness of youth. She is, so she tells herself, suffering from the unsatisfied need of sex, her sexual and maternal instincts

LEISURED WOMEN

are going unfed; this seems to her amply sufficient explanation of her dissatisfaction. But in reality her trouble lies deeper than that, it is an instinct more profound than sex or maternity that is going unfed: the instinct that demands that every human being shall feel himself to be successful, or at least capable of becoming successful, not side-tracked from all chance of success. She would find her maternal and sex instincts considerably less pressing and troublesome if they were not so powerfully reinforced by the belief, inculcated from her earliest years, that only in their gratification could a woman hope for success.

Another difficulty haunts her and tends to reinforce the belief that her work is of no real value and is not much worth doing; and often prevents the concentration, the sense of security and certainty, which makes for success.

LEISURED WOMEN

From her earliest years she has been taught to place family above community. At any moment that any member of her family needs her she is expected to abandon the work she has chosen and for which she has been carefully and expensively trained, and run and take up the post of unpaid housekeeper to him or to her. She may come to love her work, may be making a big success of it, but in the background is always the conviction, both of training and tradition, that, if her family asks it of her, she must leave the place in which she is doing really valuable work for the community, that for her means success and happiness, and go back to them. So she never feels quite safe, she never feels quite settled. She has always two roots. Perhaps next year, perhaps ten years hence, her mother will die and her father will be left lonely, and of all the family it is she, the unmarried woman,

LEISURED WOMEN

who will be expected to leave all she cares for and go back and fend for him. Or her sister will leave two young children, and, pending the time when her brother-in-law decides to marry again, it is she, the unmarried woman of the family, whose conscience will prick her if she does not throw up a post of fifteen years' standing and ruin all her chances of a successful career, in order to act as stop-gap mother to them. Very likely she, who has learnt independence, who is accustomed to command rather than to obey, is not the one who finds it easiest to adapt herself permanently to life with a brother-in-law who prefers his women fluffy, or with a father whose views on the duties and position of women have been nurtured by his Victorian mother and all-too-gentle wife. But neither she nor anyone else thinks that the brother who has never found a satisfactory job since

LEISURED WOMEN

the war, or the rich married sister who fills in her time motoring and playing bridge, should feel any sense of responsibility in the matter. These things, by tradition, lie within the province of the unmarried woman. Instinct tells her that she is of more use carrying on the career she loves and has been trained for than looking after a father who will probably be happier without her, or ruining her chances of successful work for the sake of acting as stop-gap house-keeper. But conscience is usually the product rather of training and public opinion than of instinct, and, even if instinct wins, always at the bottom of her mind she is haunted by anxieties and doubts—has she done right? . . . Always she has two roots.

The truth is that the half-way house is always a perilous place, and that the present position of women constitutes a grave danger to the whole community

LEISURED WOMEN

Women have been given freedom, but they have not been given training, opportunity, or the sense of responsibility that would teach them to use that freedom wisely.

To keep a slave class is dangerous to any community; to keep that slave class ignorant, idle, and in closest touch with and bound by all the most intimate individual ties of custom and affection to the people responsible for the brain work, the initiative and the leading of public opinion, is more dangerous still. Those few men and women who in the middle of the last century realised this danger and set to work to educate and to free women were attempting a vital service to the community, a service without which civilisation must sooner or later have perished.

But there is a condition of society even more dangerous—nay, far more dangerous—than the keeping of such a

LEISURED WOMEN

slave class as we have described. That condition is reached when the class is taught to keep its slave ideals, is allowed to stay idle and irresponsible, but is set free. That is the condition which we have reached to-day. The harem system is dangerous enough, but it is safety itself compared to the system which sets the ideals of the harem free to permeate the market-place. It were better to go back to the conditions of 1870, to keep—at whatever cost of suffering, of wasted ability, and even of danger—half the population ignorant and helpless at the mercy of the other half, than to stay as we are to-day, with our women free, or mainly free, but trained, in the leisured class, to idleness and irresponsibility, a focus of decay in the very centre of life.

(Shall we be told that the leisured class is so tiny a fraction of the whole community that what happens there is

LEISURED WOMEN

a small thing? There could be no greater fallacy. Whether we should or should not have a class able, either in view of its earning or its inheritance, to afford, if it chooses, comparative leisure for some of its members; or whether, if we have one, it should be chosen by the haphazard methods of to-day, is a question we are not here concerned to discuss. What is certain is that to-day we have such a class—and under every conceivable system of government we shall have at least an *intelligentsia* which will continue to approximate to it in essential respects—and that, taking it in its broadest sense as including all those liable to pay income tax, it comprises 99 per cent. of the educated people of the country, and of those who lead in thought, in fashion, and in action: that, in fact, it sets the tone for the whole community, and that, according to whether it is

LEISURED WOMEN

itself in a state of health or of decay, the community is bound to stand or fall.)

We are not concerned to dwell at any length upon women in the professions, since they are only negatively affected by the present position of women. It is true that their value to the community might be very much greater than it is. If more were expected of them they would have far more to give, their standard would be higher, their capacity and ability greater, and—as teachers—their influence on the rising generation infinitely more wholesome and self-respecting. But it is not they who constitute the danger of which we speak. On the contrary, their value to the community is already considerable. Their existence—in increasing numbers—is the bright side of the change that has taken place since 1870. It is the women in the home, the leisured and

LEISURED WOMEN

the semi-leisured women, who constitute a positive danger, who do, in fact, act as a focus of poison to the whole of society.

.

We have pointed to the grave danger which the present position of women constitutes to the community—what is the cure? Above all, a change of heart is needed . . . but a change of heart does not come by itself. . . .

Firstly, we have got to recognise that idleness is the unforgivable sin which breeds rot and decay wherever it is found. No human being—and it matters not a rap whether that human being is man or woman—has the right to remain idle, or semi-idle, and no human being has the right to expect the community, whether through the medium of her father or husband, or in any other fashion, to keep her, if she is not giving her full day's work in

LEISURED WOMEN

return. If the small family has come to stay, then with it must come the realisation that motherhood is no longer a full-time job—is not in itself sufficient to justify existence.

Secondly, we have got to recognise that you can only safely give people liberty if you educate them to believe that they can be, and must be, worthy of it, as worthy as anyone else in the land. That is a task for our teachers, but it is a task they are as yet incapable of performing, because before you can teach others you must yourself believe—and as yet the majority of them do not believe. How can they be taught to believe? Mainly—since they are as pervious to public opinion as any other section of the community—by a change in public opinion. How that change is to be brought about it is not our province to discuss. But some things must strike the most casual observer.

LEISURED WOMEN

It will never be possible to persuade public opinion that women are the equals of men so long as salaries and wages as between men and women are unequal. It will never be possible to persuade public opinion that women are independent, fully responsible human beings and complete citizens, so long as the law protects them specially in ways in which it does not protect men. If there is one thing which more than anything else tends to perpetuate the sense of inferiority, of not needing to stand upon their own feet, amongst women, it is the existence of such laws as those which forbid night work or Sunday work to women engaged in factories—but not to men, and such provisions as that contained in the Government's Factory Bill restricting hours of work for women—but not for men—to forty-eight per week. And be it noted, these laws, though they apply

LEISURED WOMEN

to wage-earning women only, affect public opinion in respect to all women. Again, it will never be possible to persuade public opinion that women can be as capable, and should be as free, as men, so long as trade unions are allowed, without protest, to bar women from the best-paid jobs and processes.

Thirdly, it will never be possible to make public opinion believe that women are as capable of full citizenship as men so long as in fact they are not full citizens. Women have not to-day got political equality with men, and the political inequality from which they still suffer inevitably reacts, as must any form of political inequality, on the whole public opinion of the country. It helps to form the opinion men hold of women, and it helps to form the opinion women hold of themselves. It helps to make both men and women expect less of women than of men, less

LEISURED WOMEN

courage, less balance, less judgment, less public spirit. . . . To expect less is to receive less.

The generation of 1870 set out to do a great service, but its task is not yet done, and if we of to-day leave that task unfinished we shall find that, so far from having saved society, the action of the early feminists has merely hastened its decay.



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
NEILL AND CO., LTD.
EDINBURGH.

THE HOGARTH ESSAYS

FIRST SERIES

I. MR BENNETT AND MRS BROWN.

By VIRGINIA WOOLF. 2*s.* 6*d.*

II. THE ARTIST AND PSYCHO-
ANALYSIS.

By ROGER FRY. 2*s.* 6*d.*

III. HENRY JAMES AT WORK.

By THEODORA BOSANQUET. 2*s.* 6*d.*

IV. HOMAGE TO JOHN DRYDEN.

By T. S. ELIOT. 3*s.* 6*d.*

V. HISTRIOPHONE.

By BONAMY DOBRÉE. 3*s.* 6*d.*

VI. IN RETREAT.

By HERBERT READ. 3*s.* 6*d.*

VII. FEAR AND POLITICS : A DEBATE AT
THE ZOO.

By LEONARD WOOLF. 2*s.* 6*d.*

VIII. CONTEMPORARY TECHNIQUES OF
POETRY.

By ROBERT GRAVES. 3*s.* 6*d.*

IX. THE CHARACTER OF JOHN
DRYDEN.

By ALAN LUBBOCK. 2*s.* 6*d.*

THE HOGARTH ESSAYS—*continued.*

X. WOMEN: AN INQUIRY.

By WILLA MUIR. 2s. 6d.

XI. POETRY AND CRITICISM.

By EDITH SITWELL. 2s. 6d.

XII. ANONYMITY: AN ENQUIRY.

By E. M. FORSTER. 2s.

XIII. A SHORT VIEW OF RUSSIA.

By J. M. KEYNES. 2s.

XIV. NOTES ON LAW AND ORDER.

By J. A. HOBSON. 2s. 6d.

XV. THE REVIVAL OF AESTHETICS.

By HUBERT WALEY. 3s. 6d.

XVI. ART AND COMMERCE.

By ROGER FRY. 2s. 6d.

XVII. THE POET'S EYE.

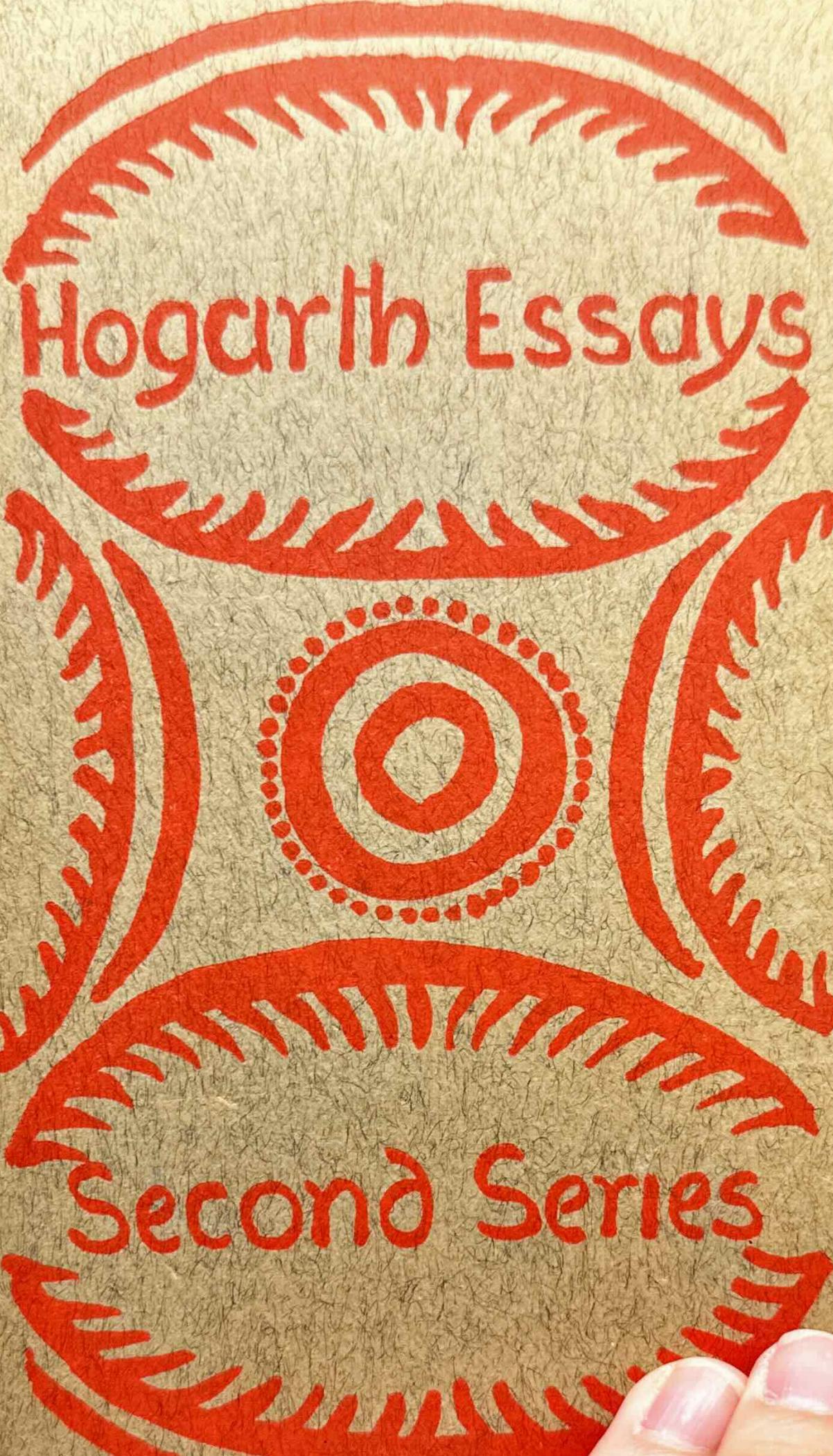
By VERNON LEE, Litt.D. 1s. 6d.

XVIII. ANOTHER FUTURE OF POETRY.

By ROBERT GRAVES. 2s. 6d.

XIX. THE STRUCTURE OF WUTHERING
HEIGHTS.

By C. P. S. 2s. 6d.



Hogarth Essays



Second Series