The Intellectual Development of Women.*

It has been the ill-luck of women in the past to be credited with qualities that placed them on a plane apart: at one time, as by the early Church, they have been endowed with a sub-human wickedness; at another, as by the age of Chivalry, they have been invested with a super-human virtue. St. Chrysostom pronounced woman to be "a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, and a painted ill." Chivalry arose, creating an ideal womanhood that stirred the imagination and the poetic fancy, and then raised it to a pinnacle where it was impossible for the actual woman to remain. Thus, both priest and knight did woman a great wrong. Whether as the "painted ill" of the Father's imagination, or as the immaculate star of the romanticist, she was equally cut off from all chance of development.

Whatever the faults of the present age, it is under no delusions with regard to the humanity

* Women in English Life, from Mediæval to Modern Times. By Georgiana Hill. In two volumes. New York: The Macmillan Company.

of woman. There are few trials, difficulties, or unpleasantnesses that she escapes on the score of sex. She is not considered incapable of bearing a part in the common life of the world on account of any ethereal qualities, nor is she held up before men's eyes as a temptation to be made war upon. In the place of mere gallantry on the part of men, and coquetry on the part of women, there is now the simpler and healthier relation of comradeship.

Except in the case of the sovereigns and a few heads of great families, English historians have given little attention to the place held by women as factors in the life of the nation. Accordingly the new book on "Women in English Life," by Miss Georgiana Hill, covers an almost new field. In it are depicted the chief causes and consequences of changes in the status of women, prominence being given to domestic life, as embracing the larger number and as not having been summed up in the numerous accounts of noteworthy women.

The position of women in England cannot be regarded as an orderly evolution. It does not show unvarying progress from age to age. There have been breaks and gaps in the general advance, so that certain periods appear at a disadvantage in comparison with their predecessors. For example, in the old days of feudalism, it is evident that in the eye of the law women ranked on an equality with men. Narrow as was the view taken by legislators of their industrial life, and absurd as many of their enactments seem now, it was reserved for modern times to set up an artificial barrier between the sexes, to push the working woman down a step, and rank her with children and "young persons." The ancient guilds knew no distinctions of sex. They were formed in the interest of the trading community, for purposes of mutual help, and were as much for the benefit of the "sisteren" as the "bretheren." The attitude of these early guilds toward women was essentially different from that of the modern trade unions, and more liberal. In their ordinances relating to labor, everywhere the principle of equality is apparent. Not until later did the theory arise that women are competitors, not co-workers with men, and that it is better for women to be dependent upon their male relatives than to make their own way in the world — a theory which still has its supporters, but is having much trouble to hold its own in the face of a surplus female population, and certain other insistent facts.

Another curious variation in public sentiment appears in regard to learning. In the sixteenth century, learning among women was held in high esteem; in the eighteenth, it was counted something to be ashamed of; in the nineteenth, it again finds favor. During England's great literary renaissance of the sixteenth century, women stand out prominently among the ranks of scholars. It was not thought unfeminine to speak good Latin, write correct Greek, or translate from the Hebrew. To be sure, they had the advantage of having their attention concentrated on a few subjects. There was less arithmetic and history and geography taught than is now imparted in the district schoolhouse. The curriculum of a lady of rank did not include many things that have now become matters of common knowledge among the children of the working-class. On the other hand, the education, if narrow according to modern ideas, was thorough; without the stimulus of college life, competitive examinations, or the prospect of rewards and honors in the shape of degrees, the attainments of women in the sixteenth century, in the subjects to which they had access, were of a high order; and their knowledge of the classics was more intimate and exact than that produced by the higher education of the present day.

After the rigorous and healthy awakening in the time of the Tudors, a period of reaction set in. The seventeenth century combined all the faults of all the ages — laxity of morals, indifference to high aims, together with religious fanaticism and a lack of appreciation of knowledge and learning. By that time, Shakespeare was considered out of date and vulgar by an age of fops and *élégantes* who could read Wycherley without blushing. James I., though a professed pedant, was adverse in every way to the progress of women. He treated them as inferiors, with ponderous levity, and nothing was further from his mind than the giving of any encouragement to the cultivation of learning among the ladies of his court. One scholar, writing to the Duchess of Newcastle, speaks of authorship as an "inferior employment," unmeet for the rank and qualities of a lady like her Grace.

The Puritan movement served to retard the intellectual advance of women. Under the sway of Puritanism, women were taught that all nature's gifts to mind or body were so many snares, and that true life consisted in crushing out all aims and desires not connected with the saving of the soul. A catch, a song, a dance, were looked upon as destructive of modesty, and only

fitted "for them that live in the lusts of the world." It was little wonder that, with learning at a discount, and accomplishments denounced as sinful, women became frivolous and narrow. The light-hearted, in rebellion against the austerities of their Puritan neighbors, plunged into excesses, and the more serious subsided into a round of domestic drudgery.

Far back in the days of the Lancastrians may be traced the progenitors of the political woman. They did not shrink from "memorials" and "petitions," even when these involved a good deal of publicity. Everything that concerned their families or the commonweal they felt to be within their "sphere," and the idea that politics was the concern of one sex alone had no place in their minds. That complex creature known as "the New Woman," to whom is ascribed, among other things, an unfeminine taste for politics, is not so modern after all.

Arriving at a view of women in the Victorian Era, we are shown what English women have done and are doing as travellers and explorers, in literature, art, trade, business, as factory hands, domestic servants, nurses, doctors, and in public and political life. Plainly, the Victorian age resembles the Elizabethan in being a time when the nation has cast its intellectual shell and become a new creature. Family and social life are affected as much as intellectual progress. The conception of woman's place in society has undergone a process of remaking in this century. Domestic life has so changed that the old role of the wife as the home-keeper must be modified. To spend the best hours of the day in what is called "looking after the house" is an anomaly in the present stage of civilization. In olden times, women had to superintend and take part in a dozen operations that are now performed in factories and workshops, and of which the modern housewife sees only the results. Many women who are not compelled to earn a living prefer to assume some daily outside occupation that enables them to keep up a more luxurious home and releases them from the monotony of sewing and household work, and gives them also some definite purpose and interest. The many excellent folk who tremble lest the world shall suffer from the adoption by women of modes of life unsanctioned by tradition may be consoled by the reflection that Nature is stronger than fashion or opinion, and will at once make her voice heard whenever the lightest of her laws is transgressed. ANNA BENNESON MCMAHAN.