

CHAPTER III

THE DAMNATION OF WOMEN

2 I remember from women of my boyhood: Mother, cousin Inez, Emma,
3 and Ide Fuller. They presented the problem of the Widow, the Wife,
4 the Maiden and the outcast. They existed not for themselves but for men;
5 their relations, they were named because of their bonds with men, living
and dead. These bonds were the real thing. They were in color, brown
and light brown, yellow with brown freckles and white.

They were not beings, they were relations and the relations were
enfilmed with mystery and secrecy. We did not know the truth or be-
lieve it when we heard it, Motherhood! What was it? We did not know
nor greatly care.

My Mother and I were good chums. I liked her. After she was dead
I loved her with a free sense of love, personal love.

Inez was a pretty grown cousin, who married. What was marriage?
We did not know, neither did she, poor thing! He came too mean for her,
a little of children, poverty, a drunken cruel companion, sickness and
death, why? why?

There was no sweeter sight than Emma; slim, straight and dainty,
darkly blushed with the passion of youth; but her life was a wild
awful struggle to crush her natural fierce joy of love. She crushed it
and became a cold calculating mockery. Last there was that awful out-
cast of the town, the white woman, Ide Fuller. What she was we did not
know. She stood to us as embodied filth and wrong--but whose filth,
whose wrong?

Grown up as I see the problem of these women transfused, I hear all about me the unanswered call of youthful love, none the less glorious because of its clean, honest, physical passion. Why unanswered? because the youth are too poor to marry, or if they marry, too poor to have children. They turn aside then in three directions: to marry for support, what men call shame, or to that which is more evil than nothing.

It is a unendurable paradox, it must be changed or the world will totter and fall.

The world wants healthy babies and intelligent workers. Today we refuse to allow the combination and force thousands of intelligent workers to go childless at a horrible expedition of moral force or dam them if they break our idiotic conventions. Only at the sacrifice of her intelligence and her charm to do her best work can the majority of modern women bear children. This is the damnation of women.

All womanhood is hampered today because of the world/that tries to worship both Virgins and Mothers and in the end despises motherhood and despoil Virgins.

The woman must have a life work and economic independence. They must have knowledge. She must have the right of motherhood at her own discretion. The present mining horror at free womanhood must pass if we are ever to be rid of the bestiality of free womanhood; not by guarding the weak in weakness do we gain strength but by making weakness free and strong.

The world must choose the Free Woman or the White Wraith of the Prostitute. Today it wavers between prostitute and man.

Civilization must show two things: The glory and beauty of creating life, the need and duty of power and intelligence. This and this only will make the perfect marriage of love and work.

Love is God

Love is God

There is no God but Love

And Work is His Prophet!

All this of Woman----but what of Black Woman?

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The world that wills to worship womankind studiously forgets its darker sisters. They seem in a sense to typify that veiled melancholy

"Whose saintly visage is too bright
To his the sense of human sight,
And therefore to our weaker view
O'er laid with black."

Yet the world must heed these daughters of sorrow - from the primal black All Mother of men down through the ghostly throng of mighty womanhood who walked in the mysterious dawn of Asia and Africa; from

Neith the primal black Mother of all,
Whose feet rest on hell and heaven,
And whose almighty hands uphold the heavens;

All religion from Beauty and Beast lies on her eager breasts;
Her body bears the stars

While her shoulders are necklaced by the Dragon

From Ancient Neith down to
"That starr'd Ethiop queen that strove
To set her beauty's praise above
The sea nymphs,"

Through dusky Cleopatra, dark Candaces, and darker, fiercer Zinghas, to our own day and our own land, in gentle Phillis, Harriet the crude Moses, the sybil Sojourner Truth and the martyr, Louise De Mortie.

The father and his worship is Asia; Europe is the precocious self-centered forward-striving child. But the Land of the Mother is and was.

41-9-395

Africa. in subtle and mysterious way, despite her curious history, her slavery, polygamy and toil, the spell of the African mother prevades her land. Isis, the Mother, is still titular goddess in thought if not in name, of the dark continent. Nor does this all seem to be solely a survival of the historic matriarchate through which all nations pass--it appears to be more than this; as if the great black race in passing up the steps of human culture gave the world not only the Iron Age, the cultivation of the soil and domestication of animals, but also, in peculiar emphasis, the Mother-idea.

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"No mother can love more tenderly, and none is more tenderly loved than the Negro mother" writes Schneider. Robin tells of the slave who bought his mother's freedom instead of his own. Mungo Park writes: "Everywhere in Africa, I have noticed that no greater affront can be offered a Negro than insulting his mother. 'Strike me,' cries a Mandingo to his enemy, 'but revile not my mother!' And the Krus and Fantis say the same. The peoples on Northern Zambezi and the great lakes cry, in sudden fear or joy: "O my mother!." And the Herero swears (Endless oath!) "By my mother's tears!" "As the mist in the seamps", cried the Angola Negro, "so lives the love of father and mother."

A student of the present Gold Coast life describes the work of the village headman, and adds:

"It is a difficult task that he is set to, but in this matter he has all-powerful helpers in the female members of the family, who will be either the aunts, or the sisters, or the cousins, or the nieces of the headman; and as their interests are identical with his in every particular, the good women spontaneously train up their children to implicit

obedience to the headman, whose rule in the family thus becomes a simple and an easy matter. 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.' What a power for good in the Native State System Would the mothers of the Gold Coast and Ashanti become by judicious training upon native lines!"

Schweinfunth declares of one tribe: "a bond between mother and child which lasts for life, is the measure of affection shown among the Dyoor;" and Ratzel adds:

"Agreeably to the natural relation the mother stands first among the chief influences affecting the children? From the Zulus to the Waganda, we find the mother the most influential counsellor at the court of ferocious sovereigns like Chaka or Mtesa; sometimes sisters take her place. Thus even with chiefs who possess wives by hundreds the bonds of blood are the strongest, and the woman though often heavily burdened, is in herself in no small esteem among the Negroes is clear from the numerous Negro queens, from the medicine-woman, from the participation in public meetings permitted to women by many Negro peoples."

As I remember through memories of others, backward through my own family, it is the Mother I ever recall; the little far off mother of my grandmothers who sobbed her life away in song, longing for her lost palm-trees and scented waters; the tall and brozen grandmother, with beaked nose and shrewish eyes who loved and scolded her black and laughing husband as he smoked lazily in his high oak chair; above all my own mother with all her soft brownness - the brown velvet of her skin, the sorrowful black-brown of her eyes, and the tiny brown-capped waves of her midnight hair as it lay new parted on her forehead. All the way back in these dim distances it is mothers and mothers of mothers that seem to count

and fathers are shadowy memories.

Upon this African Mother-idea, the westward slave trade and American slavery struck like doom: in the cruel exigencies of the traffic in men, and in the sudden unprepared emancipation, the great pendulum of social equilibrium swung from a time, in 1800, when America had but eight or less black women to every ten black men, all too swiftly to a day, in 1870, when there were nearly eleven women to ten men in our Negro population. This was but the outward numerical fact of social dislocation; within lay polygamy, polygandry, concubinage and moral degradation. They fought against all this desperately, did these black slaves in the West Indies, especially among the half free artisans; they set up their ancient household gods, and when Toussaint and Cristophe founded their kingdom in Hayti, it was based on old African tribal ties, beneath it the Mother-idea.

The crushing weight of slavery fell on black women: under it there was no legal marriage, no legal family, no legal control over children. To be sure custom and religion replaced here and there what the law denied, yet one has but to read advertisements like these to see the Hell beneath the system:

"\$100 reward will be given for my two fellows, Abram and Frank. Abram has a wife at Colonel Stewart's in Liberty county, and a sister in Savannah at Capt. Govenstine's. Frank has a wife at Mr. LeCont's Liberty County; a mother at Thunderbolt, and a sister in Savannah.

- Wm. Robarts. Walthourville, 5th Jan. 1839

"\$50 Reward - - Ran away from the subscriber, a negro girl named Maria. She is of a copper color, between 13 and 14 years of age - bare-headed and barefooted. She is small for her age - very sprightly and very likely. She stated she was going to see her mother at Maysville.

- Sanford Thomson

"\$50 Reward -- Ran away from the subscriber, his negro man Pauladore, commonly call Paul. I understand Gen. R. Y. Hayne has purchased his wife and children from H. L. Pinckney, Esq., and has them now on his plantation at Goose Creek, where, no doubt, the fellow is frequently lurking.

- T. Davis

The Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky said to the churches under their care, in 1835:

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"Brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives, are torn asunder, and permitted to see each other no more. These acts are daily occurring in the midst of us. The shrieks and agony often witnessed on such occasions proclaim, with a trumpet tongue, the iniquity of our system. There is not a neighborhood where these heart-rending scenes are not displayed. There is not a village or road that does not behold the sad procession of maimed outcasts, whose mournful countenances tell that they are exiled by force from all that their hearts hold dear".

A sister of a president of the United States declared:

"We Southern ladies are complimented with the names of wives; but we are only the mistresses of seraglios".

Out of this what sort of black woman could be born into the world of today? There are those who hasten to answer this query in writhing terms, and who say lightly and repeatedly that out of black slavery came nothing decent in womanhood; that adultery and uncleanness was their heritage and is their continued portion. It is a terrible charge - a charge humanly impossible of truth. The half million women of Negro descent who lived at the beginning of the 19th Century had become the mothers of two and one-fourth million daughters at the time of the Civil War and five million granddaughters in 1910. Can all these women be vile

and the hunted race continue to grow in wealth and character? Impossible. Yet to save from the past the shreds and vestiges of self-respect has been a terrible task - I most sincerely doubt if any other race of women could have brought its fineness up through so devilish a fire. As the sainted Dr. Crummel once said of this his sister in the blood: "In her girlhood all the delicate tenderness of her sex has been rudely outraged. In the field, in the rude cabin, in the press-room, in the factory, she was thrown into the companionship of coarse and ignorant men. No chance was given her for delicate reserve or tender modesty. From her childhood she was the doomed victim of the grossest passion. All the virtues of her sex were utterly ignored. If the instinct of chastity asserted itself, then she had to fight like a tiger for the ownership and possession of her own person, and oftentimes had to suffer pain and lacerations for her virtuous self-assertion. When she reached maturity all the tender instincts of her womanhood were ruthlessly violated. At the age of marriage - always prematurely anticipated under slavery - she was mated as the stock of the plantation were mated, not to be the companion of a loved and chosen husband, but to be the breeder of human cattle for the field or the auction block."

Down in such mire has the black motherhood of this race struggled - starving its own wailing offspring to nurse to the world their swaggering masters; welding for their children, chains which affronted even the moral sense of an unmoral world. Many a man and woman in the South have lived in wedlock as holy as Adam and Eve and brought forth their brown and golden children, but because the darker woman was helpless, her chivalrous and whiter mate could cast her off at his pleasure and publicly sneer at the body he had privately blasphemed.

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I shall forgive the White South much in its final judgment day - I shall forgive it slavery, for slavery is a world-old habit; I shall forgive its fighting for a well-lost cause and remembrance of that struggle with tender tears; I shall forgive its so-called "pride of race", the passion of its hot blood, and even its dear old laughable strutting and posing; but one thing I shall not forgive, neither in this world nor the world to come, and that is its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of the black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust. I cannot forget that it is such southern gentlemen into whose hands smug northern hypocrites of today are seeking to place our women's eternal destiny, men who insist on withholding from my mother and wife and daughter those signs and appellations of courtesy and respect which elsewhere he withholds only from bawds and courtesans.

The result of this history of insult and degradation has been both fearful and glorious: it has birthed the haunting prostitute, the brawler and the beast of burden; but it has also given the world an efficient womanhood whose strength lies in its freedom and whose chastity was won in the teeth of temptation and not in swaddling clothes.

To no modern race does its women mean so much as to us, nor come so near to the fulfillment of its meaning; as one of our women writes:

"Only the black woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.'"

They come first in earlier days like foam flashes on dark, silent waters - bits of stern dark womanhood here and there tossed almost carelessly aloft to the world's notice. First and naturally they assumed the

panoply of the ancient African Mother of Men - strong and black, whose very nature beat back the wilderness of oppression and contempt. Such an one was that cousin of my grandmother whom Western Massachusetts remembers as Mum Pett. Scarred for life by a blow received in defense of a sister she ran away to Great Barrington and was the first slave, or one of the first, to be declared free under the Bill of Rights of 1780. The Son of the judge that freed her, writes:

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"Even in her humble station, she had, when occasion required it, an air of command which conferred a degree of dignity, and gave her an ascendancy over those of her rank, which is very unusual in persons of any rank or color. Her determined and resolute character, which enabled her to limit the ravages of a Shay's mob, was manifested in her conduct and deportment during her whole life. She claimed no distinction; but it was yielded to her from her superior experience, energy, skill, and sagacity."

"Having known this woman as familiarly as I knew either of my parents, I cannot believe in the moral or physical inferiority of the race to which she belonged. The degradation of the African must have been otherwise cause than by natural inferiority."

It was such strong women that laid the foundations of the great Negro church of today with its three and half million members and fifty-six millions of dollars in property. One of the early mothers of the church, Mary Still, writes thus quaintly, in the forties:

"When we were as castouts and spurned from the large churches, driven from our knees, pointed at by the proud, neglected by the careless, without a place of worship, Allen, faithful to the heavenly calling, came forward and laid the foundation of

this connection! The women, like the women at the Sepulchre, were early to aid in laying the foundation of the temple, and in helping to carry up the noble structure, and in the name of their God, set up their banner; most of our aged mothers are gone from this to a better state of things. Yet some linger still on their staves watching with intense interest the ark as it moves over the tempestuous waves of opposition and ignorance.*

*** But the labors of these women stopped not here, for they knew well that they were subject to affliction and death. For the purpose of mutual aid, they banded themselves together in society capacity, that they might be better able to administer to each others' sufferings, and to soften their own pillows. So we find the females in the early history of the church, abounded in good works, and in acts of true benevolence."

From such spiritual ancestry came two striking figures of war time - Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

For eight or ten years previous to the breaking out of the civil war, a constant attendant at anti-slavery conventions, lectures and other meetings, was a black woman of medium size, smiling countenance, with her upper front teeth gone, attired in coarse but neat clothes and carrying always an old fashioned reticule at her side. Usually as soon as she sat down she would drop off in sound sleep.

She was born a slave in Maryland in 1820, bore the marks of the lash on her flesh, and had been made partially deaf and perhaps to some degree mentally unbalanced by a blow on the head in childhood. Yet she was one of the most important agents of the Underground railroad and a leader of fugitive slaves. She ran away in 1849, and came to Boston in 1854, where she was welcomed into the homes of the leading abolitionists; and everyone listened with tense interest to her strange stories. She was absolutely illiterate with no knowledge of geography, and yet year after year she penetrated the slave states and personally led North over 300 fugitives

without losing a single one. A standing reward of \$10,000 was offered for her, but as she said in her FATOIS: "The whites cannot catch me, for I was born with a charm, and the Lord has given me the power." She was one of John Brown's closest advisers and only severe sickness prevented her presence at Harper's Ferry.

When the War cloud broke she hastened to the front, flitting down along her own mysterious paths, haunting the armies in the field, and serving as guide and nurse and spy. She followed Sherman in his great march to the Sea and was with Grant at Petersburg, and always in the camps the Union officers silently saluted her.

The other woman belonged to a different type - a tall, gaunt, black unsmiling sybil, weighted with the Woe of the world. She ran away from slavery and giving up her own name took the name of Sojourner Truth. She says: "I can remember when I was a little young how my old mammy would sit out of doors in the evening and look up at the stars and groan, and I would say, Mammy, what makes you groan so? and she would say, 'I am groaning to think of my poor children; they do not know where I be and I don't know where they be. I look up at the stars and they look up at the stars!'"

Her determination was founded on unwavering faith in ultimate good. Wendell Phillips says that he was once in Faniel Hall, where Frederick Douglass was one of the chief speakers. Douglass had been describing the wrongs of the Colored race, and as he proceeded he grew more and more excited and finally ended by saying that they had no hope of justice from the Whites, no possible hope except in their own right arms. It must come to blood. They must fight for themselves. Sojourner Truth was sitting

tall and dark on the very front seat, facing the platform, and in the hush of feeling when Douglass sat down she spoke out in her deep peculiar voice, heard all over the house: "Frederick, is God dead?"

Such strong primitive types of Negro womanhood in America seem to some to exhaust its capabilities. They know less of a not more worthy but finer type of black woman wherein trembles all that delicate sense of beauty and striving for self-realization which is as characteristic of the Negro soul as is its quaint strength and sweet laughter. George Washington wrote in grave and gentle courtesy to a Negress in 1776 that he would "Be happy to see" at his headquarters at any time, a person "to whom nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations." This child, Phillis Wheatley, sang her grief and halting strain to a world that wondered and could not produce her like. Measured today her muse was slight and yet feeling her striving spirit we call to her still in her own words: "Through thickest glooms look back, Immortal shade." In the train of Phillis have other dark poets and singers.

Perhaps even higher than strength and art looms human sympathy and sacrifice as characteristic of Negro womanhood. Long years ago, before the Declaration of Independence, Kate Ferguson was born in New York. Freed, widowed and bereaved of her children before she was twenty, she took the children of the streets of New York, white and black, to her empty arms, taught them, found them homes; and with Dr. Mason of Murray Street Church, established the first modern Sunday school in Manhattan. Sixty years later came Mary Shadd up out of Delaware. She was tall and slim, of that ravishing dream-born beauty--that twilight of the races, which we call mulatto. Well-educated, vivacious, with determination shining from her sharp eyes, she threw herself singlehanded into the great Canadian pilgrimage when

thousands of hunted black men hurried northward and crept beneath the protection of the Lion's paw. She became teacher, editor and lecturer, tramping afoot through winters snows, pushing without blot or blemish through crowd and turmoil to conventions and meetings, and finally becoming recruiting agent for the United States Government in gathering Negro soldiers in the West.

After the War, the sacrifice of Negro women for freedom and uplift is one of the finest chapters in their history, let one life typify all: Louise DeMortie, a free born Virginia girl, lived most her life in Boston. Her high forehead, swelling lips and dark eyes marked her for a woman of feeling and intellect. She began a successful career as a public reader. Then came the War and the call. She went to the orphaned colored children of New Orleans - out of freedom into insult and oppression, and in the teeth of yellow fever. She toiled and dreamed; in 1887 she had raised money and built an orphan home and that same year, in 34th year of her young life, she died, saying simply: "I belong to God."

As I look about me today in this veiled world of mine, despite the noiser and more spectacular advance of my brothers, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count; black women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are today furnishing our teachers; they are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches, and have with small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property. If we have today, as seems likely, over a billion dollars of accumulated goods, who shall say how much of it has been wrung from the hearts of servant girls and washerwomen, and women toilers in the fields? As makers of two million homes these women are today seeking in marvelous ways to show

forth our strength and beauty and our conception of the truth.

In this land in 1910 there were 4,941,882 women of Negro descent: over twelve hundred thousand of these were children, another million were girls and young women under twenty and two and a half million were grown women. As a mass these women were unlettered, - a fourth of those from fifteen to twenty-five being unable to write. These women are passing through not only a moral, but an economic revolution. Their grandmothers married at twelve and fifteen, but twenty-seven per cent of these today who have passed fifteen are still single.

Yet these black women toil and toil hard. There were in 1910 two and a half million Negro homes in the land. Out of these walked daily two million women and girls over ten to work - over half the colored female population against a fifth in the care of white women. These then are a group of workers, fighting for their daily bread like men, independent, approaching economic freedom: they furnished a million farm laborers, 80,000 farmers, 22,000 teachers, 600,000 servants and washerwomen, and 50,000 in trades and merchandising. Subtracting the old and feeble, and we have probably not more than one and a half million.

The family group, however, which is the ideal of the culture with which these folk have been born is not based on the idea of an ^{independent} economically/working mother. Rather its ideal harks back to the sheltered harem with the mother emerging at first as nurse and homemaker, while the man remains as sole breadwinner. What is the inevitable result? Broken families. Among natives whites, one woman in ten is separated from her husband by death, divorce or desertion. Among Negroes, the ratio is one in seven. Is the cause racial? No, it is economic, because there is the same high ratio among the

white foreign born. The breaking up of the present family is the result of modern working and sex conditions and it hits the laborers with tenth force. The Negroes are put on a peculiarly difficult positions, because the wages of the male breadwinner is below standard white; the opening for colored women in certain lines of domestic work are many. Thus white toil holds the father and brother in country and town at low wages, high wages call the sisters and mothers to the city. As a result the Negro women out number the men 9 or 10 to 8 in many cities making what Charlotte Gilman bluntly call "cheap women".

What shall we say to this new economic equality in a great laboring class? Some, within and without the race deplore. Back to the homes with the women they cry and higher wage for the men. But how impossible this is and has been shown by the war conditions. Cessation of foreign migration has raised Negro mens' wages to be sure--but it has not only raised Negro womens' wages, but opened a score of men avenues of earning a living. Indeed here in microcosm and with differences emphasizing equality is the industrial history of labor in the 19th and 20th centuries. We cannot abolish the new economic freedom of women. We cannot imprison them again in a home or require them on pain or death and all be nurses and housekeepers.

Toward what we can do the black woman in America is leading.

It can be said without danger of contradiction that considering their poverty and lack of legal protection, nobody of modern women have maintained and achieved great fineness of life and strength of worthy purpose - and this too without taking into account the horror their past deliberate and forced degradation.

Not only this but today this group is developing a social leadership and a sense of deep ~~and~~ social responsibility. A glance at their work is almost bewildering. They furnish two-thirds of our teachers, an overwhelming majority of our church workers and no small proportion of our business folk, and in addition they are ^{the} ones who, turning from the beaten paths of bread and butter and livelihood, have taken up definitely and successfully the inner burden of social reform. Their work takes the form of general charity, womens clubs, old folks homes, orphanages, hospitals, Christian associations, literary and art clubs, day nurseries, settlements, kindergartens and civil reform.

Who are the leaders and moving spirits in this renaissance of womanhood among black folk? It would be perhaps unwise to single out living leaders by name. But seven unnamed ones I might select who typify the race today in its partially developed, wholly aspiring, splendidly sacrificial spirit: One, typifying the thirst for freedom, is among the clearest and most facile speakers of her sex in any land, a fearless champion in a crusade on two continents and an intrepid relentless breathless striver today. Another, typical of self-sacrifice, with her small smooth brownness, is the builder and sustainer of a great school and the loving clean unspotted type of perfect self-forgetfulness; a third, typical of brain power, is a brilliant sometimes even unscrupulous intellect of marvelous facility and unconquerable energy, who twists thousands in her fingers; a fourth, - white granddaughter of blacks - whose dramatic ability has held Boston spellbound with a complete rendition of Anthony and Cleopatra - and who took the Belasco gold medal at Sargent's, was offered one year a place in the New Theatre when

death suddenly took her. She was, of course, white though black, and once (Laugh, ye Gods!) was offered the position of leading lady in the CLANSMAN! A fifth is one who led for years the 400 organized Negro women's clubs and through them the active philanthropic rescue work among ten millions; a sixth is a young woman whose conceptions in clay brought the notice of Rodin, and the voice of a seventh was among the finest America has known but she is now singing to lead her own race to song. This is no dream nor fantasy—
these are real black women or granddaughters of black women of today. They mean something. Tomorrow they will mean more.

What is today the message of these black women to America and the world? The Uplift of Woman is, next to the Problem of the Color Line and the Peace Movement, the greatest modern cause. When now two of these movements - Woman and Color - combine in one, the combination has deep meaning.

In other years woman's way was clear: to be beautiful, to be petted, to bear children. Such is their theoretic destiny and if perchance they have been ugly, hurt, and barren, that has been forgotten with studied silence. In partial compensation for this narrowed destiny (perfectly suited to but few) the White World has lavished its politeness on its womankind - its chivalry and bows, its uncoverings, and courtesy - all the accumulated homage disused for courts and kings and craving exercise. The revolt of white women against this preordained destiny has in these latter days reached splendid proportions, but it is the revolt of an aristocracy of brains and ability - the middle class and rank and file still plod on in the appointed path, paid by the homage, the almost mocking homage of men.

From black women of America, however, (and from some others too, but chiefly from black women and their daughters' daughters,) this gaze has been withheld and without semblance of such apology they have been frankly trodden under the feet of men. They are and have been objected to, and objected to apparently for reasons peculiarly exasperating.

to reasoning beings. When in this world a man comes forward with a thought, a deed, a vision, we ask not, How does he look? but What is his message? It is of but passing interest that the messenger is beautiful or ugly-- the message is the thing. This which is axiomatic among men has been in past ages but partially true if the messenger was a Woman. The world still wants to ask that a woman primarily be pretty and if she is not, the mob pouts and asks querulously: what else are women for? Now beauty "is its own excuse of being," but there are other excuses as most men know; and when the white world objects to black women because it does not consider them beautiful, the black world of right asks two questions: What is beauty? and Suppose you think them ugly, what then? If ugliness and unconventionality and eccentricity of face and deed does not bind men from doing the world's work and reaping the world's reward, why should it bind women?

Other things being equal all of us black and white, would prefer to be beautiful in face and form and suitably clothed; but most of us are not and one of the mightiest revolts of the century is against the devilish decree that no woman is a woman who is not by present standards a beautiful woman. This decree the black women of America have in large measure escaped from the first. Not being expected to be merely ornamental, they have girded themselves for work, instead of adorning their bodies simply for play. Their sturdier minds have concluded that if a woman be clean, healthy and educated, she is as pleasing as God wills, and far more useful than most of her sisters. If in addition to this she be pink and white and straight-haired, and her fellow men prefer this, well and good; but if she be black and brown and crowned in curled mists, this is surely the flimmiest excuse for spiritual incarceration or banishment. The very attempt to do this in the case of Negro Americans has strangely overreached itself. By so much as

the defective eyesight of the white world rejects black women as beauties, by so much the more it needs them as human beings - an enviable alternative as many a white woman knows. Consequently for black women alone as a group, "handsome is that handsome does," and they are asked to be no more beautiful than God made them, but they are asked to be efficient, to be strong, fertile, muscled and able to work. If they marry they must as independent workers be able to help support their children; for their men are paid on a scale that makes sole support of the family impossible. On the whole colored working women are paid as well as whites for similar work, save in some higher grades, while colored men get from one-fourth to three-fourths less than white men. The result is curious and three-fold: the economic independence of black women is increased, the breaking up of Negro families must be more frequent and the number of illegitimate children decreases more slowly among them than other evidences of culture increase, just as was once true in Scotland and Bavaria.

What does this mean? It forecast a mighty dilemma which the world of civilization, despite its will, must one time frankly face: the unhusbanded mother or the childless wife. God send us a world with woman's freedom and married motherhood inextricably wed, but unlike He sends it, I see more of future promise in the betrayed girl-mothers of the Black Belt than in the childless wives of the North; and I have more respect for the colored servant who yields to her frank longing for motherhood than for her whiter sister who offers up children for clothes. Out of a sex freedom that today makes us shudder will come in time a day when we will no longer pay men for work they do not do for the sake of their harem; we will pay women what they earn and insist on their working and earning it; we will allow those to vote who know enough whether they be black or female, white

or male, and we will ward race suicide not by further burdening the overburdened, but by honoring motherhood even when the sneaking father shirks his duty.

"Wait till the lady passes," said a Nashville white boy

"She's no lady - she's a nigger," answered another;

So some few women are born free and some amid insult and scarlet letters achieve freedom, but our women in black had freedom thrust contempuously upon them. With that freedom they are buying an untrammeled independence; and dear as the price they pay for it, it will in the end be worth every taunt and groan. Today the dreams of the mothers are coming true.

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We have still our poverty and degradation, our lewdness and our cruel toil; but we have too a vast group of women of Negro blood who for strength of character, cleanliness of soul and unselfish devotion of purpose, is today, easily the peer of any group in the civilized world. And more than that, in the great rank and file of our five million women we have the up-working of new revolutionary ideals which must in time have vast influence on the thought and action of this land. For this, their promise and for their hard past I honor the women of my race - their beauty, their dark and mysterious beauty of midnight eyes, crumpled hair, and soft full-featured faces, is perhaps more to me than to you because I was born to its warmth and subtle spell; but their worth is yours as well as mine. No other women on earth could have emerged from the Hell of force and temptation that once engulfed and still surrounds black women in America with half the modesty and womanliness that they retain. I have always felt like bowing myself before them in all abasement searching to bring some tribute to these long suffering victims, these burdened sisters of mine, whom the world, the wise white

world loves to affront and ridicule and wantonly to insult. I have known the women of many lands and nations - know and seen and lived beside them, but none have I known more sweetly feminine, more unswervingly loyal, more desperately earnest and more instinctively pure in body and in soul than the daughters of my black mothers. This then - a little thing - to their memory, and inspiration.

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