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<POPULAR WOMEN.>

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The three chief causes of personal popularity among women are, the

admiration which is excited, the sympathy which is given, or the

pleasure that can be bestowed. We put out of court for our present

purpose the popularity which accompanies political power or

intellectual strength, this being due to condition, not quality, and

therefore not of the sort we mean. Besides, it belongs to men rather

than to women, who seldom have any direct power that can advance

others, and still seldomer intellectual strength enough to obtain a

public following because of their confessed supremacy. The popular

women we mean are simply those met with in society--women whose

natural place is the drawing-room and whose sphere is the well-dressed

world--women who are emphatically ladies, and who understand \_les

convenances\_ and obey them, even if they take up a cause, practise

philanthropy or preach philosophy. But the popular woman rarely does

take up a cause or make her philanthropy conspicuous and her

philosophy audible. Partizanship implies angles; and she has no

angles. If of the class of the admired, she is most popular who is

least obtrusive in her claims and most ingenuous in ignoring her

superiority. A pretty woman, however pretty, if affected, vain, or apt

to give herself airs, may be admired but is never popular. The men

whom she snubs sneer at her in private; the women whom she eclipses as

well as snubs do more than sneer; those only to whom she is gracious

find her beauty a thing of joy; but as she is distractingly eclectic

in her favouritism she counts as many foes as she has friends; and

though those who dislike her cannot call her ugly, they can call her

disagreeable, and do. But the pretty woman who wears her beauty to all

appearance unconsciously, never suffering it to be aggressive to other

women nor wilfully employing it for the destruction of men, who is

gracious in manner and of a pleasant temper, who is frank and

approachable, and does not seem to consider herself as something

sacred and set apart from the world because nature made her lovelier

than the rest--she is the woman whom all unite in admiring, the

popular person \_par excellence\_ of her set.

The popular pretty woman is one who, take her as a young wife (and she

must be married), honestly loves her husband, but does not thrust her

affection into the face of the world, and never flirts with him in

public. Indeed, she flirts with other men just enough to make time

pass pleasantly, and enjoys a rapid waltz or a lively conversation as

much as when she was seventeen and before she was appropriated. She

does not think it necessary to go about morally ticketed; nor does she

find it vital to her dignity nor to her virtue to fence herself round

with coldness or indifference to the multitude by way of proving her

loyalty to one. Still, as it is notorious that she does love her

husband, and as every one knows that he and she are perfectly content

with each other and therefore not on the look-out for supplements, the

men with whom she has those innocent little jokes, those transparent

secrets, those animated conversations, that confessed friendship and

good understanding, do not make mistakes; and the very women belonging

to them forget to be censorious, even though this other, this popular

woman, is so much admired.

This popular woman is a mother too, and a fond one. Hence she can

sympathize with other mothers, and expatiate on their common

experiences in the confidential chat over five o'clock tea, as all

fond mothers do and should. She keeps a well-managed house, and is

notorious for the amount of needlework she gets through; and of which

she is prettily proud; not being ashamed to tell you that the dress

you admire so much was made by her own hands, and she will give your

wife the pattern if she likes; while she boasts of even rougher

upholstery work which she and her maid and her sewing-machine have got

through with despatch and credit. She gives dinners with a \_cachet\_ of

their own--dinners which have evidently been planned with careful

thought and study; and she is not above her work as mistress and

organizer of her household. Yet she finds time to keep abreast with

the current literature of the day, and never has to confess to

ignorance of the ordinary topics of conversation. She is not a woman

of extreme views about anything. She has not signed improper papers

and she does not discuss improper questions; she does not go in for

woman's rights; she has a horror of facility of divorce; and she sets

up for nothing--being neither an Advanced Woman desirous of usurping

the possessions and privileges of men, nor a Griselda who thinks her

proper place is at the feet of men, to take their kicks with patience

and their caresses with gratitude, as is becoming in an inferior

creature. She does not dabble in politics; and though she likes to

make her dinners successful and her evenings brilliant, she by no

means assumes to be a leader of fashion nor to impose laws on her

circle. She likes to be admired, and she is always ready to let

herself be loved. She is always ready too, to do any good work that

comes in her way; and she finds time for the careful overlooking of a

few pet charities about which she makes no parade, just as she finds

time for her nursery and her needlework. And, truth to tell, she

enjoys these quiet hours, with only her children to love her and her

poor pensioners to admire her, quite as much as she enjoys the

brilliant receptions where she is among the most popular and the most

beautiful.

Her nature is gentle, her affections are large, her passions small.

She may have prejudices, but they are prejudices of a mild kind,

mainly on the side of modesty and tenderness and the quietude of true

womanhood. She is woman throughout, without the faintest dash of the

masculine element in mind or manners; and she aspires to be nothing

else. She carries with her an atmosphere of happiness, of content, of

spiritual completeness, of purity which is not prudery. Her life is

filled with a variety of interests; consequently she is never peevish

through monotony, nor yet, on the other hand, is she excited, hurried,

storm-driven, as those who give themselves up to 'objects,' and

perfect nothing because they attempt too much. She is popular, because

she is beautiful without being vain; loving without being sentimental;

happy in herself, yet not indifferent to others; because she

understands her drawing-room duties as well as her domestic ones, and

knows how to combine the home life with social splendour. This is the

best type of the popular pretty woman to whom is given admiration, and

against whom no one has a stone to fling nor a slander to whisper; and

this is the ideal woman of the English upper-class home, of whom we

still raise a few specimens, just to show what women may be if they

like, and what sweet and lovely creatures they are when they are

content to be as nature designed them.

Another kind of popular woman is the sympathetic woman, the woman who

gives instead of receiving. This kind is of variable conditions. She

may be old, she may be ugly; in fact, she is more often both than

neither; but she is a universal favourite notwithstanding, and no

woman is more sought after nor less wearied of, although few can say

why they like her. She may be married; but generally she is either a

widow or an old maid; for, if she be a wife, her sympathies for things

abroad are necessarily somewhat cramped by the pressure of those at

home;--and her sympathies are her claim to popularity. She is sincere

too, as well as sympathetic, and she is safe. She holds the secrets of

all her friends; but no one suspects that any before himself has

confided in her. She has the art, or rather the charm, of perpetual

spiritual freshness, and all her friends think in turn that the

fountain has been unsealed now for the first time. This is not

artifice; it is simply the property of deep and inexhaustible

sympathy. It is not necessary that she should be a wise adviser to be

popular. Her province is to listen and to sympathize; to gather the

sorrows and the joys of others into her own breast, so as to soften by

sharing or heighten by reduplication. Most frequently she is not over

rigid in her notions of moral prudence, and will let a lovesick girl

talk of her lover, even if the affair be hopeless and has been

forbidden; while she will do her best to soothe the man who has had

the misfortune to get crazed about his friend's wife. She has been

even known, under pressure, to convey a message or a hint; and of the

two she is decidedly more pitiful to sorrow than severe to

wrong-doing. She is in all the misfortunes and maladies of her

friends. No death takes place without her bearing part of the

mourning on her own soul; but then no marriage is considered complete

in which she has not a share. She is called on to help whenever there

is work to be done, if she be of the practical type; if of the mental,

she has merely to give up her own pleasures and her time that she may

look on and sympathize. Every one likes her; every one takes to her at

first sight; no one is jealous of her; and the law of her life is to

spend and be spent for others. It not rarely happens though, that she

who does so much for those others has to bear her own burden

unassisted; and that she sits at home surrounded by those spectres of

despair, those ghosts of sorrow, which she helps to dispel from the

homes of others. But she is not selfish; and while she trudges along

cheerfully enough under the heavy end of her friend's crosses, she

asks no one to lay so much as a finger on her own. In consequence of

which no one imagines that she ever suffers at all on her own account;

and most of her friends would take it as a personal affront were she

to turn the tables and ask for the smallest portion of that of which

she had given so much to others. She is the moral anodyne of her

circle; and when she ceases to soothe, she abdicates the function

assigned to her by nature and dies out of her allotted uses.

Another kind of popular person is the woman whose sympathies are more

superficial, but whose faculties are more brilliant; the woman who

makes herself agreeable, as it is called--that is, who can talk when

she is wanted to talk; listen when she is wanted to listen; take a

prominent part and some responsibility or keep her personality in the

background, according to circumstances and the need of the moment; who

is eminently a useful member of society, and popular just in

proportion to the pleasure she can shed around her. But she offends no

one, even though she is notoriously sought after and made much of; for

she is good-natured to all, and people are not jealous of those who do

not flaunt their successes and whom popularity does not make insolent.

The popular woman of this kind is always ready to help in the pleasure

of others. She is a fair-weather friend, and shrinks with the most

charming frankness from those on whom dark days have fallen. She is

really very sorry when any of her friends fall out from the ranks, and

are left behind to the tender mercies of those cruel camp-followers in

the march of life--sorrow or sickness; but she feels that her place is

not with them--rather with the singers and players who are stepping

along in front making things pleasant for the main body. But if she

cannot stop to smooth the pillows of a dying-bed, nor soothe the

troubles of an aching heart, she can organize delightful parties; set

young people to congenial games; take off bores on to her own

shoulders, and even utilize them for the neutralization of other

bores. She is good for the back seat or the front, as is most

convenient to others. She can shine at the state-dinner where you want

a serviceable show, or make a diversion in the quiet, not to say

stupid, conglomerate of fogies, where you want a lively element to

prevent universal stupor. She talks easily and well, and even

brilliantly when on her mettle, but not so as to excite men's envy;

and she has no decided opinions. She is a chameleon, an opal, changing

ever in changing lights, and no one was yet able to determine her

central quality. All that can be said of her is that she is

good-natured and amusing, clever, facile, and ever ready to assist at

all kinds of gatherings, which she has the knack of making go, and

which would have been slow without her; that she knows every game ever

invented, and is good for every sort of festivity; that she is always

well-dressed, even-tempered, and in (apparently) unwearied spirits and

superb health; but what she is at home, when the world is shut out,

never troubles the thoughts of any. She is to society what the

sympathetic woman is to the individual, and the reward is much the

same in both cases. But unless the socially useful woman has been able

to secure the interest of the sympathetic one, the chances are that,

popular as she is now, she will be relegated to the side when her time

of brilliancy has passed; and that, when her last hour comes, it will

find her without the comfort of a friend, forsaken and forgotten. She

is of the kind to whom \_sic transit\_ more especially applies; and if

her life's food has not been quite the husks, at all events it has not

been good meat nor fine meal.