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<WOMEN'S MEN.>

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If songs are the expressions of a nation's political temper, novels

show the current of its social morality, and what the learned would

call its psychological condition. When French novelists devote half

their stories to the analysis of those feelings which end in breaking

the seventh commandment, and the other half to the gradual evolution

of the evidence which leads to the detection of a secret murderer, we

may safely assume, on the one hand, that the marriage law presses

heavily, and, on the other, that the national intellect is of that

ingenious kind which takes pleasure in puzzles, and is best

represented by the familiar examples of dovetailing and mosaic work.

When too, we see that their common feminine type is a creature given

over as a prey to nervous fancies and an exalted imagination, of a

feverish temperament and a general obscuration of plain morality in

favour of a subtilizing and misleading kind of thing which she calls

her \_besoin d'âme\_, we may be sure that this is the type most approved

by both writer and readers, and that anything else would be

unwelcome.

The French novelist who should describe, as his central figure, a

self-disciplined, straightforward, healthy young woman, honestly in

love with her husband, rationally fond of her children, not given to

dangerous musings about the need of her soul for an elective affinity

outside her marriage bond, nor spending her hours in speculating on

the philosophy of necessity as represented by Léon or Alphonse; who

should make her absolutely impervious to the sickly sentimentalism of

the inevitable \_célibat\_, and neither palter with peril nor lament

that sin should be sinful when it is so pleasant; who should paint

domestic morality as we know it exists in France no less than in

England, and trust for his interest to the quiet pathos of unfriendly

but cleanly circumstances, would be hard put to it to make his heroine

attractive and his story popular; and his readers would not be counted

by tens of thousands, as were those who gloated over the sins of

\_Madame Bovary\_ and the prurience of \_Fanny\_. The Scandinavian type of

woman again, strong-armed, independent, athletic, practical, would not

go down with the French reading public; wherefore we may assume that

the \_Parisienne\_, as we know her in romance--feverish, subtil,

casuistic, self-deluding, and always ready to sacrifice duty to

sentiment--is the woman best liked by the people to whom she is

offered, and that the novelist but repeats and represents the wish of

his readers.

So, too, when our own novelists carry their stock puppets through the

nine hundred pages held to be necessary for the due display of their

follies and disasters, we may be sure that they are of the kind which

finds favour in the eyes of the ordinary English reader; that the

girls are the girls who please young men or do not alarm mothers, and

that the men are the men in whom women delight, and think the ideals

of their sex. If, as it is said, the delineation of her hero is the

touchstone of a woman's literary power, it must be confessed that the

touchstone discloses, for the most part, a very feeble amount of

literary power, and that the female mind has but a small perception of

all that relates to man's needs and nature.

It is the rarest thing possible to find a flesh-and-blood man in the

pages of a woman's novel; far rarer than to meet with a

flesh-and-blood young lady in the pages of a man's. They are all

either prigs, ruffians, or curled darlings; each of whom a man longs

to kick. They are goody men of such exalted morality that Sir Galahad

himself might take a lesson from them. Or they are brutes with the

well-worn square jaw and beetling brow, who translate into the milder

action of modern life the savage's method of wooing a woman by first

knocking her senseless and then carrying her off. Or they are

impossible light-weights, with small hands and artistic

tendencies--men who moon about a good deal, and are sure to love the

wrong woman in a helpless, drifting sort of way, as if it were quite

the right and manly thing to do to let themselves fall under the

dominion of a passion which a little resolution could overcome.

Sometimes, for a difference, these light-weights are men of tremendous

pluck and quality of muscle, able to thrash a burly bargee twice their

weight and development with as much ease as a steel sword can cut

through one of pith. The female crowd of present novel-writers repeat

these four types with undeviating constancy, so that we have learnt

them all by heart; and after the first outline indicative of their

attributes, we can tell who they are as certainly as we can tell

Minerva by her owl, St. Catharine by her wheel, Jupiter by his

thunderbolts, or St. Sebastian by his arrows. But in what form soever

they elect to portray their hero, they are sure to make his love for

woman his best and his dominant quality.

Few women know anything of the intricacies of a man's life and

emotion, save such as are connected with love. Yet, though love is

certainly the strongest passion in youth, it is by no means all

powerful in maturity and middle age. But the lady's hero of fifty and

upwards is as much under the influence of his erotic fancies as if he

were a boy of eighteen; and life holds nothing worth living for if he

does not get the woman with whom he has fallen in love. It seems

impossible for a woman to understand the loftier side of a man's

nature. She knows nothing, subjectively, of the political aims, the

love for abstract truth, the desire for human progress, which take him

out of the narrow domestic sphere, and make him comparatively

indifferent to the life of sense and emotion altogether. And when she

sees this she does not tolerate it. When Newton used his lady's little

finger for a tobacco-stopper, he dug his grave in the female garden of

the soul; and women rarely appreciate either Dr. Johnson or Dean

Swift, because of the absence in the one of anything like romantic

tenderness and its perversion in the other. All they care for is that

men shall be tender and true to them; idealizing as lovers; as

husbands constant and indulgent; and for this they will condone any

amount of crookedness or meanness which does not make its way into the

home. If he is complying and caressing there, he may be what fate and

the foul fiend like to make him elsewhere, so long as he is not openly

unfaithful and never gets drunk.

All the false glitter of the Corsair school is due solely to the

capacity for loving ascribed to the heroes thereof. Though a man's

name be 'linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes,' the one

virtue, being love, outweighs the thousand crimes in the estimation of

women and of the more effeminate kind of poets; and so long as the

'heart is framed for softness,' it may be 'warped to wrong' without

doing any Conrad much injury with them. The absolute rightness and

justness of a man count for little in comparison with his tenderness;

and we know of no woman whose ideal man would be one neither a saint

nor a lover.

The reason why the men of a softer civilization are in general so

successful with the women of the harder and more northerly countries

is because of the comparative softness of their manners and the larger

place which love and love-making hold among them. All who know France

know the Frenchman's jealous hatred of Italian men; which hatred we

share here in England, only we add the Frenchman to the list. We

affect to despise the arts by which the men succeed and the women are

gained over; but we cannot deny their potency, nor shut our eyes to

the esteem in which they are held by women. This is not saying that

the chivalrous habit of deference taught by civilization is not a good

thing in itself, but it is saying that it is not worth the stronger

and more essentially masculine qualities. But to women the art of

love-making is worth all the other virtues in a lump; indeed, it

comprises them all, and without it the best are valueless. It is the

crown and glory of life--the one thing to live for; and where it is

not, there is no life worthy of the name. Not that women are

insensible to the charms of public fame. If a man has made himself a

great reputation, he may throw the handkerchief where he likes, and he

will find plenty of women to pick it up. In this case they are not too

rigid in their requirements; and if his ways are a little hard and

cold, they hold themselves indemnified for the loss of personal

tenderness by the glory which surrounds a name which is now theirs. A

woman must be exceptionally silly if she cannot take comfort in her

husband's public repute for her disappointment in his private manners.

But this is only with recognized and fully successful heroes. As a

rule, no amount of manly virtues will excuse the want of the softer

graces; and the finest fellow that ever lived, the true \_anax andrôn\_

among men, must be content to be measured by women merely according to

his own estimate of them, and the power which the passion of love has

over him.

Nothing surprises men more than the odd ignorance of women concerning

them; and half the unhappiness in married life, at least in England,

springs from that ignorance. They cannot be made to understand the

differences between a man's nature and requirements and their own; and

they condemn all that they cannot understand. In those few rational

homes where men's sports and gatherings, undisturbed by the presence

of petticoats, are not made occasions for suspicion nor remonstrance,

the stock of love and happiness with which married life began is more

like the widow's cruse than elsewhere; but unfortunately for both

husbands and wives, these homes are rare; while those are common where

an extramural game of billiards in the evening is occasion for tears

or pouting, and deadly offence is taken at club dinners or a week's

shooting. The consequence of which is deceit or dissension; and

sometimes both.

The woman's ideal man has none of these erratic tendencies. His

business done, he comes home with the docility of a well-bred pointer

sent to heel, and finds energy enough after his hard day's work for a

variety of caressing cares which make him more precious in her eyes

than all the tact, the temper, the judgment, the uprightness he has

manifested in his dealings with the outside world. And the domesticity

which she claims from her husband she demands from her son. Latchkeys

are her abomination, and the 'gas left burning' is as a beacon-light

on the way of destruction. She has the profoundest suspicion of all

the men whom her boy calls his friends. She never knows into what

mischief they may lead him; but she is sure it is mischief if they

keep him away from his home in the evening. She would prescribe the

same social restraints and moral regimen for her son as for her

daughter, and she thinks the energies of masculine nature require no

wider field and no looser rein. But though she likes those tame and

tender men whom she can tie up close to her apron-strings and lovingly

imprison in the narrow domain of home, she succumbs without a struggle

to the square-jawed brute of the Rochester type, the man who dominates

her by the mere force of superior strength; and she is not too severe

on Don Juan, if only she can flatter herself that she is the best

loved--and the last. That these are the men most liked by women is

shown both by their own novels and by daily observation; and it seems

to us that, among the many subjects for extended study of late

proposed for women, a better acquaintance with men's minds, a higher

regard for the nobler kind of man and the ability to accept love as

only one of many qualities, and not always the strongest nor the most

praiseworthy of his impulses, would not be out of place.