Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition, and Duties of Woman

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The History of the
State of Maine

George Washington
WOMAN
IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY,
AND
KINDRED PAPERS
RELATING TO THE
Sphere, Condition and Duties, of Woman.

BY
MARGARET FULLER OSSOLI.

EDITED BY HER BROTHER,
ARTHUR B. FULLER.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HORACE GREELEY.

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It has been thought desirable that such papers of Margaret Fuller Ossoli as pertained to the condition, sphere and duties of Woman, should be collected and published together. The present volume contains not only her "Woman in the Nineteenth Century,"—which has been before published, but for some years out of print, and inaccessible to readers who have sought it,—but also several other papers, which have appeared at various times in the Tribune and elsewhere, and yet more which have never till now been published.

My free access to her private manuscripts has given to me many papers, relating to Woman, never intended for publication, which yet seem needful to this volume, in order to present a complete and harmonious view of her thoughts on this important theme. I have preferred to publish them without alteration, as most just to her views and to the reader; though, doubtless, she would have varied their expression and form before giving them to the press.

It seems right here to remark, in order to avoid any misapprehension, that Margaret Ossoli's thoughts were not directed so exclusively to the subject of the present volume as have been the minds of some others. As to the movement for the emancipation of Woman from the unjust burdens and disabilities to which she has been subject even in our own land, my sister could neither remain indifferent nor silent; yet she preferred, as in respect to every other reform, to act independently and to speak
independently from her own stand-point, and never to merge her
individuality in any existing organization. This she did, not as
condemning such organizations, nor yet as judging them wholly
unwise or uncalled for, but because she believed she could herself
accomplish more for their true and high objects, unfettered by
such organizations, than if a member of them. The opinions
avowed throughout this volume, and wherever expressed, will,
then, be found, whether consonant with the reader’s or no,
in all cases honestly and heartily her own,—the result of her
own thought and faith. She never speaks, never did speak, for
any clique or sect, but as her individual judgment, her reason and
conscience, her observation and experience, taught her to speak.

I could have wished that some one other than a brother should
have spoken a few fitting words of Margaret Fuller, as a woman,
to form a brief but proper accompaniment to this volume,
which may reach some who have never read her “Memoirs,”
recently published, or have never known her in personal life.
This seemed the more desirable, because the strictest verity in
speaking of her must seem, to such as knew her not, to be eulogy.
But, after several disappointments as to the editorship of the
volume, the duty, at last, has seemed to devolve upon me; and
I have no reason to shrink from it but a sense of inadequacy.

It is often supposed that literary women, and those who are
active and earnest in promoting great intellectual, philanthropic,
or religious movements, must of necessity neglect the domestic
concerns of life. It may be that this is sometimes so, nor can
such neglect be too severely reprehended; yet this is by no means
a necessary result. Some of the most devoted mothers the world
has ever known, and whose homes were the abode of every domestic
virtue, themselves the embodiment of all these, have been women
whose minds were highly cultured, who loved and devoted both
thought and time to literature, and were active in philanthropic
and diffusive efforts for the welfare of the race.

The letter to M., which is published on page 345, is inserted
chiefly as showing the integrity and wisdom with which Margaret
advised her friends; the frankness with which she pointed out to
every young woman who asked counsel any deficiencies of char-
acter, and the duties of life; and that among these latter she gave
due place to the humblest which serve to make home attractive and happy. It is but simple justice for me to bear, in conjunction with many others, my tribute to her domestic virtues and fidelity to all home duties. That her mind found chief delight in the lowest forms of these duties may not be true, and it would be sad if it were; but it is strictly true that none, however humble, were either slighted or shunned.

In common with a younger sister and brother, I shared her care in my early instruction, and found ever one of the truest counsellors in a sister who scorned not the youngest mind nor the simplest intellectual wants in her love for communion, through converse or the silent page, with the minds of the greatest and most gifted.

During a lingering illness, in childhood, well do I remember her as the angel of the sick-chamber, reading much to me from books useful and appropriate, and telling many a narrative not only fitted to wile away the pain of disease and the weariness of long confinement, but to elevate the mind and heart, and to direct them to all things noble and holy; ever ready to watch while I slept, and to perform every gentle and kindly office. But her care of the sick—that she did not neglect, but was eminent in that sphere of womanly duty, even when no tie of kindred claimed this of her, Mr. Cass's letter abundantly shows; and also that this gentleness was united to a heroism which most call manly, but which, I believe, may as justly be called truly womanly. Mr. Cass's letter is inserted because it arrived too late to find a place in her "Memoirs," and yet more because it bears much on Margaret Ossoli's characteristics as a woman.

A few also of her private letters and papers, not bearing, save, indirectly, on the subject of this volume, are yet inserted in it, as further illustrative of her thought, feeling and action, in life's various relations. It is believed that nothing which exhibits a true woman, especially in her relations to others as friend, sister, daughter, wife, or mother, can fail to interest and be of value to her sex, indeed to all who are interested in human welfare and advancement, since these latter so much depend on the fidelity of Woman. Nor will anything pertaining to the education and
care of children be deemed irrelevant, especially by mothers, upon whom these duties must always largely devolve.

Of the intellectual gifts and wide culture of Margaret Fuller there is no need that I should speak, nor is it wise that one standing in my relation to her should. Those who knew her personally feel that no words ever flowed from her pen equalling the eloquent utterances of her lips; yet her works, though not always a clear expression of her thoughts, are the evidences to which the world will look as proof of her mental greatness.

On one point, however, I do wish to bear testimony—not needed with those who knew her well, but interesting, perhaps, to some readers into whose hands this volume may fall. It is on a subject which one who knew her from his childhood up—at home, where best the heart and soul can be known,—in the unrestrained hours of domestic life,—in various scenes, and not for a few days, nor under any peculiar circumstances—can speak with confidence, because he speaks what he “doth know, and testifieth what he hath seen.” It relates to her Christian faith and hope. “With all her intellectual gifts, with all her high, moral, and noble characteristics,” there are some who will ask, “was her intellectual power sanctified by Christian faith as its basis? Were her moral qualities, her beneficent life, the results of a renewed heart?” I feel no hesitation here, nor would think it worth while to answer such questions at all, were her life to be read and known by all who read this volume, and were I not influenced also, in some degree, by the tone which has characterized a few sectarian reviews of her works, chiefly in foreign periodicals. Surely, if the Saviour’s test, “By their fruits ye shall know them,” be the true one, Margaret Ossoli was preeminently a Christian. If a life of constant self-sacrifice,—if devotion to the welfare of kindred and the race,—if conformity to what she believed God’s law, so that her life seemed ever the truest form of prayer, active obedience to the Deity,—in fine, if carrying Christianity into all the departments of action, so far as human infirmity allows,—if these be the proofs of a Christian, then whoever has read her “Memoirs” thoughtfully, and without sectarian prejudice or the use of sectarian standards of judgment, must feel her to have been a Christian. But not alone in