
Woman's Work in Modern Society

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WOMAN'S WORK
IN
MODERN SOCIETY.

BY
M. F. CUSACK.

"The woman's cause is man's."
—*The Princess.*

KENMARE PUBLICATIONS.

1874



HQ1221
C95



P R E F A C E.



THOSE who stand and watch the rushing torrent, are more likely to discern whither it is going, and what it bears on its surface, than those who are dashed along on its resistless waves. They can see and sympathise with the agonising efforts of those who strive to breast the mighty waters, to steer the little bark of life, without shipwreck, to the eternal shore.

They see those who are miserably unconscious of their danger, sometimes because they will not see it, sometimes because they do not see it.

They have asked themselves, Whither is the bark of life hastening? to what shore?



Whence has this bark of life come? from whom? to what end? In the still strength of silent power, they stand:—not in unsympathising indifference, for they also have life; and while there is life, such are the conditions of our race, that there must be suffering and conflict.

They have mastered, or still are effectually striving to master, their mental powers, which are at once the source of human weakness and of human strength.

They are better able to estimate correctly the affairs of humanity, since practically they stand apart from them, and this, rather because they have a higher estimation of their importance, than from a selfish indifference.

All theories of life that are not founded on the true conditions of life must necessarily be defective. We must clearly understand the end of being if we would know how to attain the perfection of being. He who looks for a lower destiny for man than that

which his Maker has ordained, shows but pitifully in the race of life. Not discerning his patent of nobility, he feeds with swine; not appreciating his royal rights, he seeks for honour in dishonour, and for glory in shame. And yet, so great is the blindness and infatuation of such men, that, like chanticleer on his dung-heap, they make the air discordant with their shrill and noisy cries of vaunted superiority. I would ask, from men who do not disdain to think, a careful-consideration of the subject of this work. I would appeal to that chivalrous courtesy which is certainly not yet dead in Old England. I would ask them, for the sake of their mothers, their sisters, and their wives, to treat the subject of Woman's destiny with the importance which it merits. To remember that women were not made to be the playthings of an idle hour, the toys of a wanton dalliance, the slaves of a selfish despotism.

It is old-fashioned to quote the Bible; but



I am not young now, and I do not believe that England, once the England of faith, has become altogether the England of infidelity. So I dare venture to quote the Bible, to appeal to it as an authority, to uphold its precepts as Divine commands to which we are all bound to listen with the respect of obedience.

I appeal to women. I beg of them to lay aside for a little the sensational romance, and to look stern facts in the face; for, so sure as there is a sun in the heavens this day, the future of England, the future of the world, will be what women make it.

In every crisis of history, we find the power of women predominant. There are signs abroad that a crisis in the world's history is coming very rapidly. It could not be otherwise. The fall of a nation is nearest when its civilisation is greatest. The destinies of a race are in most danger when its power is greatest. The inevitable Law, which regulates the rise

and fall of states, may not be altogether evaded. But though we are subject to law, law is also, in a certain and most true sense, subject to us. Death is a law of nature; we must all die; but the law is subject to us, inasmuch as that, under certain conditions, or as it were bye-laws of the law, we can retard or hasten the execution of the law.

What is true of the part, is true of the aggregate. Peoples are an aggregation of individuals. What is done by the greater number of individuals, gives the momentum to the race for prosperity or adversity.

To return to our first simile—The bark goes over, founders, is shipwrecked, or goes on safely, according to the action of the majority on board.

But let it not be forgotten that responsibility is individual. We may be in a minority of good, which cannot effect the salvation of our people. But we must not cease to work because we know that our work is hopeless



to effect all that is desired. We have a duty to fulfil to ourselves, and to our God; we have our own destinies absolutely in our own control; we are bound, at the risk of an awful peril, to save our own bark from foundering, and in doing so, we may be very sure that we shall do much for others, though we may not accomplish all that we desire.

A distinguished member of the bar, who has read some of the proof-sheets of this work, tells me that my views of Political Economy are not likely to prove very acceptable to the public, and specifies the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Saturday Review* as probable critics. I do not wish by any means to deprecate criticism, but I do not think that the writers in these or other papers would object to a better remuneration for female labour, and that is the one point on which I have insisted. How many cases of suicide, and how many cases of real, literal starvation, arise from the greed which will not pay fair wages to the poor workwoman! How many girls are

driven to a life which they abhor simply to get bread, the bread which is denied to them by those who squander on folly what is due to justice !

Mr Carlyle's recent letter on the spirit in which labour is done in the present day does not need a repetition here. But he has not even glanced at the cause of the evil which he deplores. We cannot expect full value unless we pay full value ; and we cannot expect respect for labour until we teach its true dignity.*

Personal explanations are rarely necessary, and seldom desirable ; but in the present case, a personal explanation is due to others. The subject of the present work has been very constantly before the writer for several years, and notes have been made for it, but without any definite idea as to the shape in which they should be put forth.

A decision has been arrived at by receiving

* We have Mr Ruskin now preaching its necessity in a very practical manner to Oxford undergraduates.

a letter from a lady moving in the higher circles of London society, who was previously quite unknown to us except by name. She wrote earnestly requesting that such a work should be written, and added the name of an Anglican clergyman who had expressed a similar wish.

As the twofold request was accompanied by an offer to assist the publication in every way, I could not refuse, and other and pressing work has been laid aside for the present. When women of the higher classes are found to give a practical and earnest impetus to the diffusion of Christian literature, and to desire that the latent and overt scepticism of the day should be combated both by press and pulpit, we cannot be without hope for the Women of the Future.