

think it well founded. The better bred women do not presume on their sex; and the area of good breeding is always widening. It need hardly be said that the community at large gains by the softening and restraining influence which the reverence for womanhood diffuses. Nothing so quickly incenses the people as any insult offered to a woman. Wife-beating, and indeed any kind of rough violence offered to women, is far less common among the rudest class than it is in England. Field work or work at the pit-mouth of mines is seldom or never done by women in America; and the American traveller who in some parts of Europe finds women performing severe manual labour is revolted by the sight in a way which Europeans find surprising.

In the farther West, that is to say, beyond the Mississippi, in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific States, one is much struck by what seems the absence of the humblest class of women. The trains are full of poorly dressed and sometimes (though less frequently) rough-mannered men. One discovers no women whose dress or air marks them out as the wives, daughters, or sisters of these men, and wonders whether the male population is celibate, and if so, why there are so many women. Closer observation shows that the wives, daughters, and sisters are there, only their attire and manner are those of what Europeans would call middle class and not working class people. This is partly due to the fact that Western men affect a rough dress. Still one may say that the remark so often made that the masses of the American people correspond to the middle class of Europe is more true of the women than of the men, and is more true of them in the rural districts and in the West than it is of the inhabitants of Atlantic cities. I remember to have been dawdling in a book-store in a small town in Oregon when a lady entered to inquire if a monthly magazine, whose name was unknown to me, had yet arrived. When she was gone I asked the salesman who she was, and what was the periodical she wanted. He answered that she was the wife of a railway workman, that the magazine was a journal of fashions, and that the demand for such journals was large and constant among women of the wage-earning class in the town. This set me to observing female dress more closely, and it turned out to be perfectly true that the women in these little towns

were following the Parisian fashions very closely, and were, in fact, ahead of the majority of English ladies belonging to the professional and mercantile classes.¹ Of course in such a town as I refer to there are no domestic servants except in the hotels (indeed, almost the only domestic service to be had in the Pacific States was till very recently that of Chinese), so these votaries of fashion did all their own housework and looked after their own babies.

Three causes combine to create among American women an average of literary taste and influence higher than that of women in any European country. These are, the educational facilities they enjoy, the recognition of the equality of the sexes in the whole social and intellectual sphere, and the leisure which they possess as compared with men. In a country where men are incessantly occupied at their business or profession, the function of keeping up the level of culture devolves upon women. It is safe in their hands. They are quick and keen-witted, less fond of open-air life and physical exertion than Englishwomen are, and obliged by the climate to pass a greater part of their time under shelter from the cold of winter and the sun of summer. For music and for the pictorial arts they do not yet seem to have formed so strong a taste as for literature, partly perhaps owing to the fact that in America the opportunities of seeing and hearing masterpieces, except indeed operas, are rarer than in Europe. But they are eager and assiduous readers of all such books and periodicals as do not presuppose special knowledge in some branch of science or learning, while the number who have devoted themselves to some special study and attained proficiency in it is large. The fondness for sentiment, especially moral and domestic sentiment, which is often observed as characterizing American taste in literature, seems to be mainly due to the influence of women, for they form not only the larger part of the reading public, but an independent-minded part, not disposed to adopt the canons laid down by men, and their preferences count for more in the opinions and predilections of the whole nation than is the case in England.

¹ The above, of course, does not apply to the latest immigrants from Europe, who are still European in their dress and ways, though in a town they become quickly Americanized.

Similarly the number of women who write is infinitely larger in America than in Europe. Fiction, essays, and poetry are naturally their favourite provinces. In poetry more particularly, many whose names are quite unknown in Europe have attained widespread fame.

Some one may ask how far the differences between the position of women in America and their position in Europe are due to democracy? or if not to this, then to what other cause?

They are due to democratic feeling in so far as they spring from the notion that all men are free and equal, possessed of certain inalienable rights, and owing certain corresponding duties. This root idea of democracy cannot stop at defining men as male human beings, any more than it could ultimately stop at defining them as white human beings. For many years the Americans believed in equality with the pride of discoverers as well as with the fervour of apostles. Accustomed to apply it to all sorts and conditions of men, they were naturally the first to apply it to women also; not, indeed, as respects politics, but in all the social as well as legal relations of life. Democracy is in America more respectful of the individual, less disposed to infringe his freedom or subject him to any sort of legal or family control, than it has shown itself in Continental Europe, and this regard for the individual enured to the benefit of women. Of the other causes that have worked in the same direction two may be mentioned. One is the usage of the Congregationalist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, under which a woman who is a member of the congregation has the same rights in choosing a deacon, elder, or pastor, as a man has. Another is the fact that among the westward-moving settlers women were at first few in number, and were therefore treated with special respect. The habit then formed was retained as the communities grew, and propagated itself all over the country.

What have been the results on the character and usefulness of women themselves?

Favourable. They have opened to them a wider life and more variety of career. While the special graces of the feminine character do not appear to have suffered, there has been produced a sort of independence and a capacity for self-help which are increasingly valuable as the number of unmarried

women increases. More resources are open to an American woman who has to lead a solitary life, not merely in the way of employment, but for the occupation of her mind and tastes, than to a European spinster or widow; while her education has not rendered the American wife less competent for the discharge of household duties.

How has the nation at large been affected by the development of this new type of womanhood, or rather perhaps of this variation on the English type?

If women have on the whole gained, it is clear that the nation gains through them. As mothers they mould the character of their children; while the function of forming the habits of society and determining its moral tone rests greatly in their hands. But there is reason to think that the influence of the American system tells directly for good upon men as well as upon the whole community. Men gain in being brought to treat women as equals rather than as graceful playthings or useful drudges. The respect for women which every American man either feels or is obliged by public sentiment to profess, has a wholesome effect on his conduct and character, and serves to check the cynicism which some other peculiarities of the country foster. The nation as a whole owes to the active benevolence of its women, and their zeal in promoting social reforms, benefits which the customs of Continental Europe would scarcely have permitted women to confer. Europeans have of late years begun to render a well-deserved admiration to the brightness and vivacity of American ladies. Those who know the work they have done and are doing in many a noble cause will admire still more their energy, their courage, their self-devotion. No country seems to owe more to its women than America does, nor to owe to them so much of what is best in social institutions and in the beliefs that govern conduct.