

XVII.

THE POSITION OF WOMAN.

No one who is interested in the welfare and progress of the Asiatic nations can approach the question of female education without feelings of sadness as profound as the need of effort is felt to be great. The American who leaves his own country, in which the high honor paid to woman is one of the chief glories of the race to which he belongs, is shocked and deeply grieved at beholding her low estate in pagan lands. He is scarcely surprised at the wide difference between the Eastern and the Western man; for this he has expected. He can not, however, explain the low condition of woman by the corresponding state of civilization. He sees that the one is out of all proportion to the other. An inferior grade of civilization does not necessitate the extreme subjection of woman. If Tacitus records rightly, the ancient barbarians, whose descendants are the Germanic races, surpassed even the civilized Romans in the respect paid to their women. The Western man in Asia sees that abject obedience as daughter, wife, and widowed mother is the lot of woman, as ordained by the wisdom of the ancients and fixed by the custom of ages. He sees the might of physical force, and the power of government and society, in league to keep her crushed as near to the level of the unreplying brute as possible. He finds that the religious systems agree in denying her a soul; the popular superstitions choose her as the scapegoat for all tempted and sinning men; and that spirit of monastic asceticism whose home is in the East selects her as the symbol of all that is opposed to the peace and purity of the aspiring saint.

The student of Asiatic life, on coming to Japan, however, is cheered and pleased on contrasting the position of women in Japan with that in other countries. He sees them treated with respect and consideration far above that observed in other quarters of the Orient. They are allowed greater freedom, and hence have more dignity and self-confidence. The daughters are better educated, and the national annals will show probably as large a number of illustrious women as

those of any other country in Asja. In the time of their opportunity—these last days of enlightenment—public and private schools for girls are being opened and attended. Furthermore, some of the leaders of New Japan, braving public scandal, and emancipating themselves from the bondage of an etiquette empty of morals, are learning to bestow that measure of honor upon their wives which they see is enthusiastically awarded by foreigners to theirs, and are not ashamed to be seen in public with their companions. A few have married wives on the basis of a civil contract, endowing them with an equal share and redress before the law. Still better, Christian Japanese lead their brides to Christian altars, to have the sanctions of religion, though not the despotism of a hierarchy, to cement their marital union. In Christian churches, Japanese father, mother, and children sit together—a strange sight in Asia. The mikado's Government has made direct efforts to improve the condition of his female subjects. The *eta* women, with the men, have been lifted to the level of citizenship. The marriage laws have been so reformed as to allow the different classes of society to intermarry.

The abolition of beggary, though a general public benefit, deserves to be spoken of in this place. The introduction of improved silk-reeling machinery and the increasing area of tea-producing territory, by widening the field of female employments, have tended to swell the number of virtuous women, and diminish the ranks of the courtesans. Above all, the grand scheme of educating the girls as well as the boys throughout the country, and the establishment of schools of a high grade for young women, are triumphant evidences of a real desire to elevate the position of women in Japan, and to develop the capabilities of the sex.

But what has thus far been done can not be looked upon as any thing more than mere indications of the better time to come—the gray light before the far-off full day. As yet, the country at large has felt only the faint pulses of the new ideas. The bondage of enslaving theological tenets is to be cast off, popular superstitions are to be swept away, and the despotism of the Chinese classics—if Japan wishes to rise higher in the scale of civilization than China—is to be relaxed, before the Japanese woman becomes that factor of invincible potency in the progress and regeneration of Japan which it is possible for her to be.

That the progress of the nation depends as much upon the condition of woman as upon that of man, is a principle not yet current in

Asia. The idea that still remains as a lingering superstition, and the grossest relic of barbarism among Western nations, that might makes right, makes religion, makes every thing, is the corner and cap stone of Asiatic civilization. The gentle doctrines of the Indian sage have mollified the idea somewhat; but in China and Japan, the hand that holds the sword is the sole arbiter of the destinies of woman. The greatest dread which the extreme conservatives of the *Yamato damashi* feel is that Western notions of the equality of man and woman should prevail. Such ideas, they imagine, will subvert all domestic peace, and will be the ruin of society and the nation. For the state of things to be "as if a hen were to crow in the morning," seems that point in the sea of troubles beyond which the imagination of man (in Japan) utterly fails to go.

The whole question of the position of Japanese women—in history, social life, education, employments, authorship, art, marriage, concubinage, prostitution, religion, benevolent labor, the ideals of literature, popular superstitions, etc.—discloses such a wide and fascinating field of inquiry, that I wonder no one has yet entered it. I resist the temptation to more than glance at these questions, and shall content myself with a mere sketch of the position and education of woman in Japan. The roots of this subject are not reached by a peep into a public bath-house. We must consult history, literature, art, and ideals. Our ideas and prejudices must not be the standard. Japanese see, with true vision, much to condemn among us that passes for purity and religion. Let us judge them fairly.

Of one hundred and twenty-three Japanese sovereigns, nine have been women. The custodian of the divine regalia is a virgin priestess. The chief deity in their mythology is a woman. Japanese women, by their wit and genius, made their native tongue a literary language. In literature, art, poetry, song, the names of women are among the most brilliant of those on the long roll of fame and honor on whose brows the Japanese, at least, have placed the fadeless chaplet of renown. Their memory is still kept green by recitation, quotation, reading, and inscription on screen, roll, memorial-stone, wall, fan, cup, and those exquisite works of art that delight even alien admirers east and west of the Pacific.

In the records of the Japanese glory, valor, fortitude in affliction, greatness in the hour of death, filial devotion, wifely affection, in all the straits of life when codes of honor, morals, and religion are tested in the person of their professors, the literature of history and romance,

the every-day routine of fact, teem with instances of the Japanese woman's power and willingness to share whatever of pain or sorrow is appointed to man. In the annals of persecution, in the red roll of martyrs, no names are brighter, no faces gleam more peacefully amidst the flames, or on the cross of transfixing spears, or on the pyre of rice-straw, or on the precipice edge, or in the open grave about to be filled up, than the faces of the Christian Japanese women in the seventeenth century. Such is the position of woman in Japan in the past.

So far of herself. The foreign reader must remember that I have not formed these opinions by a hasty glimpse of life at the sea-ports of Japan, where the scum of the world meets the dregs of that country, but after several years of residence in an interior city and in the capital. Further, I am placing the average woman in Japan against the average woman in other lands. I am stating the position of woman in her relation to man and society in Shin Koku. In comparing all other Asiatic nations, I am inclined to believe that Japan, in respect and honor to women, is the leader of them all.

The foreign resident of India, Burmah, or China, coming to Japan, is surprised and pleased to find the Japanese accord to their women so large a measure of respect and considerate care. No woman's feet are ever bound, and among the middle and lower classes she is almost as much at liberty to walk and visit as in our own land. An amount of social freedom prevails among womankind in Japan that could hardly be expected in a country at once Asiatic, idolatrous, and despotic. No foreign reader can accuse me of undue eulogy of the Japanese after including them within the pale inclosed by the three adjectives just penned, "Asiatic, idolatrous, and despotic"—the educated, the enlightened, the rising men of Japan loathe the words. The writer who applies these stinging epithets to them will receive any thing but thanks. They do not like to be called Asiatics; they despise idolatry (Buddhism); and they are even now emerging from despotism to constitutional monarchy and representative government. Nevertheless I have written it, and it explains woman's position and character in Japan, and brings us to the standing-point where we may note the shadows in the picture.

I shall not dwell upon the prevalent belief of foreigners that licentiousness is the first and characteristic trait in her character, nor upon the idea that ordinary chastity is next to unknown in Japan, for I do not believe that such is the case. That the idea of spiritual purity as taught by Christ—of the sin of defilement without reference to any

thing physical or external, the commission of sin by the mere thought of, or looking upon, lust—is generally unknown, I believe fully. That the loftiest teachings of Buddhism or Shintō have failed utterly to purify them of this phase of their low moral status, I also believe. On the other hand, it must be stated that the chief patrons of human flesh let out on hire in Japan are from Christendom.

It is the heathen religion itself that we are to arraign for the low state of woman in Japan as compared with that in Christian lands. The only religion in Japan worthy of a name, in the sense of a binding system of dogmatics, or a purifying and elevating moral power, is Buddhism. Yet even in this there is no hope of immortality for a woman unless she is reborn as a man, which means that there is no salvation for a woman. In the eye of Buddhist dogma, ecclesiastical law, and monkish asceticism, woman is but a temptation, a snare, an unclean thing, a scape-goat, an obstacle to peace and holiness. Shintō, a religion so called, seems to accord her a higher place; but Shintō can never sway the heart and mind of modern Japanese people.

A great principle and an Asiatic institution are the causes of the degradation of the Japanese women. The one is filial obedience, the other polygamy. The idea that filial obedience should be the cause of woman's degradation may strike the American reader as passing strange. In this land of irreverent children the assertion may be doubted, yet it is true. The exaggeration of this principle in China has kept that great nation stagnant for tens of centuries, and to-day blocks the advance of Christianity and of civilization. Duty to parents overshadows all other duties.

The Japanese maiden, as pure as the purest Christian virgin, will at the command of her father enter the brothel to-morrow, and prostitute herself for life. Not a murmur escapes her lips as she thus filially obeys. To a life she loathes, and to disease, premature old age, and an early grave, she goes joyfully. The staple of a thousand novels, plays, and pictures in Japan is written in the life of a girl of gentle manners and tender heart, who hates her life and would gladly destroy it, but refrains because her purchase-money has enabled her father to pay his debts, and she is bound not to injure herself. In the stews of the great cities of Japan are to-day, I doubt not, hundreds of girls who loathe their existence, but must live on in gilded misery because they are fulfilling all righteousness as summed up in filial piety.*

* More than one European writer has attempted to shed a poetical halo around

So long as the institution of concubinage exists in Japan, home-life can never approach in purity and dignity to that in Christian countries. It is often asked, "Are the Japanese polygamous?" The question has two answers. A Japanese has but one legal wife, but he may have two or three more women if he chooses, or can support them.

the Yoshiwara system of Japan, while, on the other hand, well-meaning people have extensively circulated the absurd statements that the Japanese do not regard the business of these places as immoral; that it is quite common for Japanese gentlemen to make wives of the inmates; that they exist in every city; and more and worse. Not a few foreigners believe that "there is not a virtuous woman in Japan"—a slander that well befits the mouths of the ignorant bigots and seared libertines who alike utter it. It is true that in Japan there is not that sensitiveness on this subject that exists among English-speaking people, and that an ambitious young man in the lower social ranks, who aspires to wed an intellectual wife, will occasionally marry one of the bright, witty, educated girls who may have fascinated him in the Yoshiwara. This is rather her conquest than his. It is true that the yearning of these poor prisoners who have women's hearts is to win the love of a good man, to be a virtuous wife, to keep house, to be the joyful mother of children, and enter the path of purity; and that Japanese society applauds the aspiration, forgives the past, and welcomes the person. Many a book of poems written by inmates of the Yoshiwara will show this, even if there was no other proof. On the other hand, the social evil in Japan is shorn of some features so detestably conspicuous in other countries. The street-walker is unknown. The place set apart for the vile business is rarely inside the city, but in its suburbs. A man may live for years in a Japanese city, and see none of the moral leprosy, such as nightly floods Broadway, the Haymarket, and Boulevard des Italiens. I have known American gentlemen, thoroughly at home in the language, who in years of intercourse with the people have never received an improper proposal. It is also true that the Yoshiwara, so far from being what some European writers make it, is only another name for misery, degradation, and vice, in which suicide, disease, premature old age, abandonment, or blight wastes the lives of thousands of victims. The real opinion of Japanese people is expressed by their proverbs: "There is no truth in a courtesan;" "When you find a truthful prostitute and a four-cornered egg, the moon will appear before her time." There are tens of thousands of young men in Japan who have never entered the Yoshiwara. The common word among the students for what pertains to them is *dokiu* (poison). The unlicensed are called *jigoku onna* (hell-women). The opinion of the Government of these places is shown in the fact, that after a defalcation, murder, or gross crime, detectives are sent first to them. The Yoshiwara is a fenced plague spot, a moral quarantine, found only in the very large cities and sea-ports, not in the old daimiō's capitals. The truth is, that the Japanese have the same problems of social evil to deal with as other nations. They have tried to solve them in the best way they know. It must be confessed that, in some respects, they have succeeded better than we have. The moral status of the Japanese is low enough, and every friend of Japan knows it; but let us tell the truth, even about the heathen. So far as they try to bridle crime, or solve mighty problems, they are deserving of sympathy, not censure. How far the placing of the Yoshiwara under rigid medical inspection will improve or degrade the moral status of the community, is yet to be proved.

One wife, if fruitful, is the rule. In case of failure of an heir, the husband is fully justified, often strongly advised even by his wife, to take a handmaid to raise up seed to preserve the ancestral line. To judge of the prevalence of concubinage in Japan, we must not select either Tōkiō or the sea-ports. The one is the capital, as full of political and social corruption as our own; the others are abnormally luxurious places. After careful examination of the facts, I believe the actual proportion of men who have concubines in addition to their true wives is not over five per cent. of the whole population. Of those financially able to maintain the indulgence, the percentage is probably twenty.

The husband holds the power of the sword. The divorced wife has little or no redress. Yet the facility of divorce is not availed of as much as if there were no father-in-law, brothers, male friends, or female neighbor's tongues in the question. Seven causes for justifiable divorce are laid down in the classics of Confucius, which are the basis of legal morals in Japan as in China, or as those of Justinian are with us. The wife may be divorced—

1. If she be disobedient to her parents-in-law. (After marriage, in her husband's home, his parents become hers in a far more significant sense than among us.)

2. If she be barren. (If the husband loves his childless wife, he keeps and supports her.)

3. If she be lewd or licentious. (She must not be given to loose talk or wine. It is not proper for her even to write a letter to any other man.)

4. If she be jealous (of other women's clothes, or children, or especially of her husband).

5. If she have a loathsome or contagious disease. (If dearly beloved, she may be kept in a separate room and cared for.)

6. If she steal.

7. If she talk too much.

It is needless to say that the seventh and last reason is the one frequently availed of, or pretended. The Japanese think it is a good rule that works but one way. The husband is not divorced from the wife for these equal reasons. Of course, woman in Japan, by her tact, tongue, graces, and charms, is able to rule her husband generally by means invisible to the outer world, but none the less potent. Though man holds the sword, the pen, and divorce, and glories in his power, yet woman, by her finer strength, in hut as in palace hall, rules her lord.

In the Japanese home, in which there is more that is good and mor-

the inmate of those homes in the West in which the Bible is the first, and last, and often the only book.

Only a small proportion of Japanese girls attain an advanced knowledge of Chinese characters, though many of the samurai daughters have read the standard Japanese histories; and in the best native schools at present a certain amount of the reading and writing of Chinese characters is taught, and one or two good histories of Japan are read. In the national, traditionary, heroic, and historic lore of their own country, I doubt very much whether the children of any country in the world are better instructed or informed than the Japanese children.

The fruits of this education, as modified or strengthened by social circumstances and religion, are seen in the present type of the Japanese woman. As compared with her sister in Western lands, and as judged by her own standards, she is fully the peer in that exquisite taste for the beautiful and becoming as displayed in dress and personal adornment; nor is she inferior in the graces of etiquette and female proprieties.

No ladies excel the Japanese in that innate love of beauty, order, neatness, household adornment and management, and the amenities of dress and etiquette as prescribed by their own standard. In maternal affection, tenderness, anxiety, patience, and long-suffering, the Japanese mothers need fear no comparison with those who know the sorrows and rapture of maternity in other climes. As educators of their children, the Japanese women are peers to the mothers of any civilization in the care and minuteness of their training of, and affectionate tenderness and self-sacrificing devotion to, offspring, within the limits of their light and knowledge. Though the virago and the shrew are not unknown characters in this Land of Great Peace, yet the three fundamental duties of woman, which include all others, and as laid down in the Chinese classics, are almost universally fulfilled without murmurings or hesitation. These duties are, first, obedience to her parents (the father) when a child; second, obedience to her husband when a wife; third (at least formal), obedience to her eldest son when a widow. Indeed, the whole sum of excellencies and defects of the Japanese female character arise from one all-including virtue, and the biography of a good woman is written in one word—obedience. Japanese biographies, let me add, contain quite as much truth as the average lives of dead people written in English. If unvarying obedience, acquiescence, submission, the utter absorption of her personality into that of her

husband, constitute the ideal of the perfect woman, then the Japanese married women approach so near that ideal as to be practically perfect, and in this respect are, as foreign women will cheerfully grant to them, unquestionably superior.

The Japanese maiden is bright, intelligent, interesting, modest, lady-like, self-reliant; neither a slave nor a wanton. What the American girl is in Europe, the Japanese maiden is among Asiatics. Both are misunderstood. A Japanese virgin may act in a way not reconcilable with our standards. She may expose her charms so as to shock our exalted and chaste masculinity. Lighter-skinned womankind may see moral obliquity in an eye not perfectly horizontal, when there is none. The Japanese virgin knows nothing of the white lady's calculated limits of exposure, or of scientific dress-making, which by an inch of affluent economy exerts a more wicked influence than a nude bust empty of intent to charm.

The importance of the new education of Japanese girls to their country can not be overestimated. The revolution through which the nation is passing requires completion. The new reforms, of the necessity of which the leaders of Japan are convinced, and to which they are pledged, require to be certified, and to become part of the home-life of the people. The work of the Government must be done in the homes. The foundations of society are there; and as the home is, so will the State be in every land. All governments, in their various forms, are but households of a larger growth. Given a complete knowledge of the average household in any land, and the real government is easily known and understood.

Looking at the question of female education even from the vulgar concrete standing-point—that woman is merely the supplement of man, and that the end and aim and Almighty purpose of a woman's creation is that she shall become some man's wife—the question is all-important. The rising generation, who are to take the places of the present leaders of Japan, are being educated in Western ideas, and are passing through a developing process which will tend to exalt the mental powers at the expense of the animal instincts. The decay of the old feudal frame-work of society, and the suppression of government pensions and hereditary revenues, by removing all actual necessity for marriage, will create in the minds of the increasing numbers of those who marry from the higher motives a desire for a congenial life-companion and helpmate, and not for a mere female of the human species. Though some of the present generation of students may

marry ordinary native women, those who wish for happiness in their home-life, who aspire to rise out of the old plane of existence and dwell permanently on the higher levels of intellectual life, will seek for educated women as wives. The new civilization will never take root in Japan until planted and cultivated in the homes, and, to secure that end, the thorough education of woman is an absolute necessity.

In conclusion, I must add my testimony and offer my plaudit to the earnest diligence and rapid progress of the girls in the national schools, of whose efforts and successes I have been witness, and which must be extremely gratifying to those who organized or who are interested in them. Of the signal success, far-reaching influence, and exalted teachings of the Christian missionary schools for girls, I can not speak in too high terms. In this good work, American ladies have led the way. By them the Japanese maiden is taught the ideals, associations, and ordering of a Christian home, a purer code of morals, a regenerating spiritual power, of which Buddhism knows nothing, and to which the highest aspirations of Shintō are strangers. Above all, an ideal of womanhood, which is the creation and gift of Christianity alone, eclipsing the loftiest conceptions of classic paganism, is held up for imitation. The precept and example of Christian women in these labors are mightily working the renovation of the social fabric in Japan.

I think none will accuse me of failure to see the best side of the Japanese character, or of an honest endeavor to estimate fairly the force and capability of the religions of Japan. Fully conscious of my liability to error in all that I have written in this book, I yet utter my conviction that nothing can ever renovate the individual heart, nothing purify society, and give pure blood-growth to the body politic in Japan, but the religion of Jesus Christ. Only the spiritual morality, and, above all, the chastity, taught by Him can ever give the Japanese a home-life equal to ours. With all our faults and sins, and with all the impurities and failures of our society, I believe our family and social life to be immeasurably higher and purer than that of Japan.

The religion of the Home-maker, and the Children-lover, and the Woman-exalter, is mighty to save the Japanese mother, and must be most potent to purify and exalt the Japanese home. Of all the branches of missionary labor in Japan, none, it seems to me, is of greater importance, or more hopeful of sure results, permanent and far-reaching in its influence, than the work of Christian women for women in Japan,