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WOMAN'S WORK IN AMERICA

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EDITED BY

ANNIE NATHAN MEYER

* WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

JULIA WARD HOWE



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1891

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THE MERRISON COMPANY PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

To Mr. Theodore Stanton, the editor of "The Woman Question in Europe," I hasten to acknowledge my indebtedness. After reading that interesting book it occurred to me that a volume on the work of women in America could be made equally valuable and interesting.

In the spring of 1888, therefore, I began to collect the necessary material. Naturally it was not possible, nor did it seem desirable, to follow the exact lines of Mr. Stanton's work. In his book, each chapter is devoted to a different country, and the woman question therein is treated by the author of the chapter in all of its aspects.* It seemed best, on the contrary, to divide the American history as nearly as possible into as many chapters as there are phases of woman's work. The task of selecting as collaborators eighteen women, where so many brilliant women abound, was a very difficult one; I need say nothing in defense or explanation of my choice, however, but am satisfied to let the work done speak for itself.

But before the task of selecting the contributors came that of dividing the whole great field of woman's work. Here I can only bow my head before the flood of criticism that is bound to bear down upon me. I suppose it is inevitable that to many it will seem that undue importance has been accorded to one subject, and too little to another. I can but plead that in no case have I allowed myself to be influenced by prejudice, but only by the best judgment I was capable of bringing to bear. On mentioning this book to a well-known editor and poet (a man), I was gravely asked why I had omitted a chapter on "Woman in Marriage," as it would make a very readable and certainly a very prolific subject. My answer was that so far as I knew women had never been denied that privilege, and so it could have no legitimate place in my book. In that

* With the exception of the chapter on England, which is divided into three parts.

reply, although uttered lightly, lies the principle upon which I have worked ; the fields of labor described here contain evidences of woman's progress ; they are those in which women, if entrance were not absolutely denied them, were at least not welcomed, nor valued. Furthermore, they are phases of woman's work that have some direct bearing on the status of woman in this country.

And now a word on the object of the book, for many will shrug their shoulders and say : " Why separate *work* into *man's* work and *woman's* work ? What is gained by this division ? Why not be content with the simple word *work* ? Is it not sufficient to be a factor in the world's growth, or must the ages keep a constant reckoning of *meum* and *tuum* ? "

If the time has come when the word work is a neuter noun, I admit that the value of this book would be reduced ; but even then I think it might justly claim a historical value, a value as a history of the struggle on woman's part to have her work accepted just as a " factor in the world's growth," judged on its own merits, not

Mere woman's work,
Expressing the comparative respect
Which means the absolute scorn.

But aside from the value of the book as a record, it claims a value as an inspiration to greater effort ; for in our eyes the time has not yet come when all effort should cease. The arguments against the development of woman have been many, and although centuries have passed, the changing years merely ring different tones upon the same theme. We may acknowledge that the day is past when it is necessary seriously to plead the capacity of woman to accomplish certain things ; that victory has been won with tears of blood ; but the fight still centers about the propriety of it. The large band of ignorant and prejudiced objectors is fast giving place to another of a more kindly, but more dangerous type. More dangerous because instead of employing the weapons of disdain, they use those of homage ; instead of goading with scorn, they disarm with the incense of a false and hollow sentimentality. This new wave of feeling divides Life into Intellect and Emotion, the Mind and the Heart, Matter and Soul, etc., the one man, woman the other. These sentimentalists, who certainly include as many women as men, argue that every woman is the natural companion of man, and so is upheld by some strong shoulder. When faced by the awful statistics of unmarried

females in the United States, they fall back on some hypothetical father, brother, or cousin. Therefore it is considered highly supererogatory that a woman should be taught to stand upon her own feet, when the adjacent shoulder answers the purpose as well. This belief holds its own with a peculiar tenacity, because there is a certain heroic satisfaction in retaining your sentiment notwithstanding all the arguments that can be brought forward by the low materialists.

This book is nothing else than a history of woman's slow, but sure, training to stand balanced upon her own feet. She has looked about upon the thousands of falling sisters, and has very reasonably reached the conclusion that the only way to make sure of standing is to make use of her own feet.

Women have many so-called champions of their "purity," and "innocence;" champions that are shocked at opening so many new fields of "man's work" to women; but they are strangely ignorant of the very real contamination to which they expose their *protégés* by crowding them into the few already overcrowded channels, and refusing to let in fresh air and sunshine. Men and women both are born into the world helpless and unprotected; it may seem an ugly and bitter truth, but it is so, that in this struggle for existence daily going on about us, men and women do indeed stand "side by side,"—not, as with the poet,

Full summed in all their powers,

but each individually carrying on a struggle against suffering, starvation, crime, and death,—forces that remorselessly attack women, barren of the chivalrous regard of sex with which these sentimentalists seem to grace them.

And if it is true that both sexes fight the same battle for existence, who can honestly deny to women (at present physically the weaker), the best possible equipment that education of all kinds can furnish? I shall not even touch upon the other, and more poetic, argument of the divine rights of genius, which is of no sex; but I am content to employ only the prosaic one of the practical needs of life, an argument which here in America is by far the most potent one.

My own labors on this book have been purely editorial; and after selecting the chapters, and the authors, and laying down certain general principles and suggestions, my responsibility ceased. The principles laid down by me have been:

Facts and history rather than eloquence;
Truth before picturesqueness;