THE ADVENTITIOUS CHARACTER OF WOMAN

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There is more than one bit of evidence that nature changed her plan with reference to some organisms at the very last moment, and introduced a feature which was not contemplated at the outset. This change of plan is carried out through the specialization of some organ, sense, or habit, to such a degree as to make practically a new type of the organism. In the human species, for example, the atrophied organs distributed through the body are evidence that the physical make-up of the species was well-nigh definitely fixed before the advantage of free hands led to an erect posture, thereby throwing certain sets of muscles out of use; and the specialization of the voice as a means of communicating thought was, similarly, a device for relieving the hands of the burden of communication, and was not introduced systematically until a gesture language had been so well established that even now we fall back into it unconsciously, especially in moments of excitement, and attempt to talk with our hands and bodies.

But perhaps the most interesting modification or reversal of plan to be noted in mankind is connected with the relation of the two sexes. As will presently be indicated, life itself was in the beginning female, so far as sex could be postulated of it at all, and the life-process was primarily a female process, assisted by the male. In humankind as well, nature obviously started out on the plan of having woman the dominant force, with man as an aid; but after a certain time there was a reversal of plan, and man became dominant, and woman dropped back into a somewhat unstable and adventitious relation to the social process. Up to a certain point, in fact, in his physical and social evolution man shows an interesting structural and mental adaptation to woman, or to the reproductive process which she represents; while the later stages of history show, on the other hand, that

the mental attitude of woman, and consequently her forms of behavior, have been profoundly modified, and even her physical life deeply affected, by her effort to adjust to man.

The only attitude which nature can be said to show toward life is the design that the individual shall sustain its own life, and at death leave others of its kind—that it shall get food, avoid destruction, and reproduce. In pursuance of this policy it naturally turns out that those types showing greater morphological and functional complexity, along with freer movement and more mental ingenuity, come into the more perfect control and use of their environment, and consequently have greater likelihood of survival. Failing of this greater complexity, their chance of life lies in occupying so obscure a position, so to speak, that they do not come into collision with more dominant forms, or in reproducing at such a rate as to survive in spite of this. The number of devices in the way of modification of form and habit to secure advantage is practically infinite, but all progressive species have utilized the principle of sex as an accessory of success. By this principle greater variability is secured, and among the larger number of variations there is always a chance of the appearance of one of superior fitness. The male in many of the lower forms is very insignificant in size, economically useless (as among the bees), often a parasite on the female, and, as many biologists hold, merely a secondary device or after-thought of nature designed to secure greater variation than can be had by the asexual mode of reproduction. In other words, he is of use to the species by assisting the female to reproduce progressively fitter forms.

When, in the course of time, sexual reproduction eventuated in a mammalian type, with greater intimacy between mother and offspring and a longer period of dependence of offspring on the mother, the function of the male in assisting the female became social as well as biological; and this was pre-eminently so in the case of man, because of the pre-eminent helplessness of the human child. The characteristic helplessness of the child, which at first thought appears to be a disadvantage, is in fact the source of human superiority, since the design of nature in provid-

ing this condition of helplessness is to afford a lapse of time sufficient for the growth of the very complex mechanism, the human brain, which, along with free hands, is the medium through which man begins that reaction on his environment—inventing, exterminating, cultivating, domesticating, organizing—which ends in his supremacy.

It is plain, therefore, that species in which growth is slow are at an advantage, if to the care and nourishment of the female are added the providence and protection of the male; and this is especially true in mankind, where growth is not completed for a long period of years. In this connection we have an explanation of the alleged greater variability of the male. Instead of an insignificant addendum to the reproductive process, he becomes larger than the female, masterful, jealous, a fighting specialization—still an attaché of the female, but now a defender and provider. This is the general condition among mammals; and among mankind the longer dependence of children results in a correspondingly lengthened and intimate association of the parents, which we denominate marriage. For Westermarck is quite right in his view that children are not the result of marriage, but marriage is the result of children. From this point of view marriage is a union favored by the scheme of nature because it is favorable to the rearing and training of children, and the groups practicing marriage, or its animal analogue, have the best chance of survival.

But the evolution of a courageous and offensive disposition had naturally not resulted in an eminently domestic disposition. Man did the hunting and fighting. He was attached to the woman, but he was not steady. He did not stay at home. The woman and the child were the core of society, the fixed point, the point to which man came back. There consequently grew up a sort of dual society and dual activity. Man represented the more violent and spasmodic activities, involving motion and skilful co-ordinations, as well as organization for hunting and fighting; while woman carried on the steady, settled life. She was not able to wander readily from a fixed point, on account of her children; and, indeed, her physical organization fitted her for

endurance rather than movement. Consequently her attention was turned to industries, since these were compatible with settled and stationary habits. Agriculture, pottery, weaving, tanning, and all the industrial processes involved in working up the by-products of the chase, were developed by her. She seems to have been the first to domesticate animals—beginning, perhaps, with man. She built her house, and it was hers. She did not go to her husband's group after marriage. The child was hers, and remained a member of her group. The germ of social organization was, indeed, the woman and her children and her children's children. The old women were the heads of civil society, though the men had developed a fighting organization and technique which eventually swallowed them up.

From the standpoint of physical force, man was the master, and was often brutal enough. But woman led an independent life, to some extent. She was, if not economically independent, at least economically creative, and she enjoyed the great advantage of being less definitely interested in man than he was in her. For while woman is more deeply involved physiologically in the reproductive life than man, she is apparently less involved from the standpoint of immediate stimulus, or her interest is less acute in consciousness. The excess activity which characterizes man in his relation to the general environment holds also for his attitude toward woman. Not only is the male the wooer among the higher orders of animals and among men, but he has developed all the accessories for attracting attention—in the animals, plumage, color, voice, and graceful and surprising forms of motion; and in man, ornament and courageous action. For primitive man, like the male animal, was distinguished by ornament.

Up to this time the relation of man to woman was the natural development of a relation calculated to secure the best results for the species. His predacious disposition had been, in part at least, developed in the service of woman and her child, and he was emotionally dependent on her to such a degree that he used all the arts of attraction at his command to secure a relation with her. In the course of time, however, an important change took

place in environment conditions. While woman had been doing the general work and had developed the beginnings of many industries, man had become a specialist along another line. His occupation had been almost exclusively the pursuit of animals or conflict with his neighbors, and in this connection he had become an inventor of weapons and traps, and in addition had learned the value of acting in concert with his companions. But a hunting life cannot last forever; and when large game began to be exhausted, man found himself forced to abandon his destructive and predacious activities, and adopt the settled occupations of woman. To these he brought all the inventive technique and capacity for organized action which he had developed in his hunting and fighting life, with the result that he became the master of woman in a new sense. Not suddenly, but in the course of time, he usurped her primacy in the industrial pursuits, and through his organization of industry and the application of invention to the industrial processes became a creator of wealth on a scale before unknown. Gradually also he began to rely not altogether on ornament, exploits, and trophies to get the attention and favor of woman. When she was reduced to a condition of dependency on his activity, wooing became a less formidable matter, and he even began to negotiate for her and purchase her from her male kindred. In unadvanced stages of society, where machinery and the division of labor and a high degree of organization in industry have not been introduced, and even among our own lower classes, woman still retains a relation to industrial activities and has a relatively independent status. Among the Indians of this country it was recognized that a man could not become wealthy except through the possession of a sufficient number of wives to work up for trade the products of the chase; and today the West African youth does not seek a young woman in marriage but an old one, preferably a widow, who knows all about the arts of preparing and adulterating rubber. Among peasants, also, and plain people, the proverb recognizes that the "gray mare is the better horse." The heavy, strong, enduring, patient, often dominant type frequently seen among the lower classes, where alone woman is still economically

functional, is probably a good representative of what the women of our race were before they were reduced by man to a condition of parasitism which, in our middle and so-called higher classes, has profoundly affected their physical, mental, and moral life.

On the moral side, particularly, man's disposition to bend the situation to his pleasure placed woman in a hard position and resulted in the distortion of her nature, or rather in bringing to the front elemental traits which under our moral code are not reckoned the best. In the animal world the female is noted for her indirection. On account of the necessity of protecting her young, she is cautious and cunning, and in contrast with the open and pugnacious methods of the more untrammelled male, she relies on sober colors, concealment, evasion, and deception of the senses. This quality of cunning is, of course, not immoral in its origin, being merely a protective instinct developed along with maternal feeling. In woman, also, this tendency to prevail by passive means rather than by assault is natural; and especially under a system of male control, where self-realization is secured either through the manipulation of man or not at all, a resort to trickery, indirection, and hypocrisy is not to be wondered at. Man has, however, always insisted that woman shall be better than he is, and her immoralities are usually not such as he greatly disapproves. There has, in fact, been developed a peculiar code of morals to cover the peculiar case of woman. This may be called a morality of the person and of the bodily habits, as contrasted with the commercial and public morality of man. Purity, constancy, reserve, and devotion are the qualities in woman which please and flatter the jealous male; and woman has responded to these demands both really and seemingly. Without any consciousness of what she was doing (for all moral traditions fall in the general psychological region of habit), she acts in the manner which makes her most pleasing to men. And—always with the rather definite realization before her of what a dreadful thing it is to be an old maid—she has naïvely insisted that her sisters shall play well within the game, and has become herself the most strict censor of that morality which has become traditionally associated with woman. Fearing the obloquy which the

world attaches to a bad woman, she throws the first stone at any woman who bids for the favor of men by overstepping the modesty of nature. Morality, in the most general sense, represents the code under which activities are best carried on, and is worked out in the school of experience. It is pre-eminently an adult and a male system, and men are intelligent enough to recognize that neither women nor children have passed through this school. It is on this account that, while man is merciless to woman from the standpoint of personal behavior, he exempts her from anything in the way of contractual morality, or views her defections in this regard with allowance and even with amusement.

In the absence of any participation in commercial activity, and with no capital but her personal charms and her wits, and with the possibility of realizing on these only through a successful appeal to man, woman naturally puts her best foot first. It was, of course, always one of the functions of the female to charm the male; but so long as woman maintained her position of economic usefulness and her quasi-independence she had no great problem, for there was never a chance in primitive society, any more than in animal society, that a woman would go unmated. But when through man's economic and social organization, and the male initiative, she became dependent, and when in consequence he began to pick and choose with a degree of fastidiousness, and when the less charming women were not married—especially when invidious distinctions arose between the wed and unwed, and the desirably wed and the undesirably wed, woman had to charm for her life; and she not only employed the passive arts innate with her sex, but flashed forth in all the glitter which had been one of man's accessories in courtship, but which he had dispensed with when the superiority acquired through occupational pursuits enabled him to do so. Under a new stimulation to be attractive, and with the addition of ornament to the repertory of her charms, woman has assumed an almost aggressive attitude toward courtship. The means of attraction she employs are so highly elaborated, and her technique is so finished, that she is really more active in courtship than man.

We speak of man as the wooer, but falling in love is really mediated by the woman. By dress, behavior, coquetry, modesty, reserve, and occasional boldness she gains the attention of man and infatuates him. He does the courting, but she controls the process. "Er glaubt zu schieben, und er wird geschoben."

The condition of limited stimulation, also, in which woman finds herself as a result of the control by man of wealth, of affairs, of the substantial interests of society, and even of her own personality, leads woman to devote herself to display as an interest in itself, regardless of its effect on men. In doing this she is really falling back on an instinct. One of the most powerful stimulations to either sex is glitter, in the most general sense, and the interest in showing off begins in the coloration and plumage of animals, and continues as ornament in the human species. It is true that the wooing connotation of ornament was originally its most important one, and that it was characteristic of man in particular; but woman has generalized it as an interest, and as a means of self-realization. She seeks it as a means of charming men, of outdoing other women, and as an artistic interest; and her attention often takes that direction to such a degree that its acquisition means satisfaction, and its lack discontent. Sometimes, indeed, when a woman is married and knows that she is "sped," she drops the display pose altogether, tends to lose herself in household interests, and to become a slattern. On the other hand, she often makes marriage the occasion of display on a more elaborate scale, and is pitiless in her demands for the means to this. A glance at the windows of our great stores shows that men have organized their business in a full appreciation of these facts. Dressing, indeed, becomes a competitive game with women, and since their opponents and severest critics are women, it turns out curiously enough that they dress even more with reference to the opinion of women than for men.

The land hath bubbles as the water has,
And these are of them.

It would, of course, be absurd to censure woman too greatly for these frailties, and it would be very unjust to imply that all women share them. Some women, in adapting themselves to the

situation, follow, apparently, a bent acquired in connection with the maternal instinct, and become true and devoted and grand to a degree hardly known by man. Others, following a bent gotten along with coquetry in connection with the wooing instinct, and having no activity through which their behavior is standardized, become difficile, unreal, inefficient, exacting, unsatisfied, absurd. And we have also the paradox that the same woman can be the two things at different times. There is therefore a basis of truth in Pope's hard saying that "Women have no characters at all." Because their problem is not to accommodate to the solid realities of the world of experience and sense, but to adjust themselves to the personality of men, it is not surprising that they should assume protean shapes.

Moreover, man is so affected by the charms of woman, and offers so easy a mark for her machinations, as to invite exploitation. Having been evolved largely through the stimulus of the female presence, he continues to be more profoundly affected by her presence and behavior than by any other stimulus whatever, unless it be the various forms of combat. From Sampson and Odysseus down, history and story recognize the ease and frequency with which a woman makes a fool of a man. The male protective and sentimental attitude is indeed incompatible with resistance. To charm, pursue, court, and possess the female involve a train of memories which color all after-relations with the whole sex. In both animals and men there is an instinctive disposition to endure a great deal from the female. The male animal takes the assaults of the female complacently and shamefacedly, "just like folks." Peasants laugh at the hysterical outbreaks of their women, and the "bold bad man" is as likely to be henpecked as any other. Woman is a disturbing element in business and in school to a degree not usually apprehended. In her presence a man instinctively assumes a different attitude. He is, in fact, so susceptible as seemingly, almost, to want to be victimized, and, as Locke expressed the matter, "It is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived."

This disposition of men and the detached condition of woman

have much to do with the emergence of the adventuress and the sporting-woman. Human nature was made for action, and perhaps the most distressing and disconcerting situation which confronts it is to be played on by stimulations without the ability to function. The mere superinducing of passivity, as in the extreme case of solitary confinement, is sufficient to produce insanity; and the emotion of dread, or passive fear, is said to be the most painful of emotions, because there is no possibility of relief by action. Modern woman is in a similar condition of constraint and unrest, which produces organic ravages for which no luxury can compensate. The general ill-health of girls of the better classes, and the equally general post-matrimonial breakdown, are probably due largely to the fact that the nervous organization demands more normal stimulations and reactions than are supplied. The American woman of the better classes has superior rights and no duties, and yet she is worrying herself to death—not over specific troubles, but because she has lost her connection with reality. Many women, more intelligent and energetic than their husbands and brothers, have no more serious occupations than to play the house-cat, with or without ornament. It is a wonder that more of them do not lose their minds; and that more of them do not break with the system entirely is due solely to the inhibitive effects of early habit and suggestion.

As long as woman is comfortably cared for by the men of her group or by marriage, she is not likely to do anything rash, especially if the moral standards in her family and community are severe. But an unattached woman has a tendency to become an adventuress—not so much on economic as on psychological grounds. Life is rarely so hard that a young woman cannot earn her bread; but she cannot always live and have the stimulations she craves. As long, however, as she remains with her people and is known to the whole community, she realizes that any infraction of the habits of the group, any immodesty or immorality, will ruin her standing and her chances of marriage, and bring her into shame and confusion. Consequently, good behavior is a protective measure—instinctive, of course; for it is not true that the ordinary girl has imagination enough to think

out a general attitude toward life other than that which is habitual in her group. But when she becomes detached from home and group, and is removed not only from surveillance, but from the ordinary stimulation and interest afforded by social life and acquaintanceship, her inhibitions are likely to be relaxed. The girl coming alone from the country to the city affords one of the clearest cases of detachment. Assuming that she comes to the city to earn her living, she is not only handicapped on the economic side to a degree which makes it impossible to obtain those accessories to her personality in the way of finery which would be sufficient to satisfy her and hold her attention if they were to be had in plenty, but she is lost from the sight of everyone whose opinion has any meaning to her, while the separation from her home community renders her condition peculiarly flat and lonely, and prepares her to accept any opportunity for stimulation. To be completely lost sight of by all who have previously known her may, under these circumstances, become an object—the only means by which she can without confusion accept more intense stimulations than are legitimate in the humdrum life of a poor home. And to pass from a regular to an irregular life for a season and back again, before the fact has been noted, is a course much more usual than is ordinarily suspected. The theory which accounts for the short career of the fast woman on the score of an early death is well-nigh groundless. Society simply cannot keep track of these women; and the world is so large that they reappear in the ordinary walks of life, marry and are given in marriage—and the world is no wiser. There are thousands of girls leading irregular lives in our large cities whose parents think they are in factories, stores, and business positions; and many of them will return to their native communities, or drift farther, and be married, and make good wives—uncommonly good wives, many of them, because they have had their fling. “If you drive nature out at the door, she will come back through the window;” and this interest in greater stimulation is, I believe, the dominant force in determining the choice—or, rather, the drift—of the so-called sporting-woman. She is seeking what, from the psychological standpoint, may be called a normal life.

The human mind was formed and fixed once for all in very early times, through a life of action and emergency, when the species was fighting, contriving, and inventing its way up from the sub-human condition; and the ground-patterns of interest have never been, and probably never will be, fundamentally changed. Consequently, all pursuits are irksome unless they are able, so to speak, to assume the guise of this early conflict for life in connection with which interest and modes of attention were developed. As a matter of fact, however, anything in the nature of a problem or a pursuit stimulates the emotional centers, and is interesting, because it is of the same general pattern as these primitive pursuits and problems. Scientific and artistic pursuits, business, and the various occupational callings are analogues of the hunting, flight, pursuit, courtship, and capture of early racial life, and the problems they present may, and do, become all-absorbing. The moral and educational problem of development has been, indeed, to substitute for the simple, co-ordinative killing, escaping, charming, deceiving, activities of early life, analogues which are increasingly serviceable to society, and to expand into a general social feeling the affection developed first in connection with courtship, the rearing of children, and joint predatory and defensive enterprises. The gamester, adventuress, and criminal are not usually abnormal in a biological sense, but have failed, through defective manipulation of their attention, to get interested in the right kind of problems. Their attention has not been diverted from interests of a primary type containing a maximum of the sensory, to interests of an analogous type containing more elements of reflection, and involving problems and processes of greater benefit to society.

The remedy for the irregularity, pettiness, ill-health, and unserviceableness of modern woman seems to lie, therefore, along educational lines. Not in a general and cultural education alone, but in a special and occupational interest and practice for women, married and unmarried. This should be preferably gainful, though not onerous nor incessant. It should, in fact, be a play-interest, in the sense that the interest of every artist and craftsman, who loves his work and functions through it, is a play-

interest. Normal life without normal stimulation is not possible, and the stimulations answering to the nature of the nervous organization seem best supplied by interesting forms of work. This reinstates rationally developed stimulations better than anything except play; and interesting work is, psychologically speaking, play.