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WOMEN and the SERVICE

of the EMPIRE

BY

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## WOMEN AND THE SERVICE OF THE EMPIRE.

### I

WHEN we stand back from familiar things, and see them with fresh eyes, *sub specie novitatis*, we are apt to experience a surprise—and then to learn a lesson. One of the familiar things in the life of most of us is that an Englishwoman should go overseas with her husband, to Ceylon or Trinidad or British Guiana, to Bagdad or Singapore or Hong Kong, to share his life and to be by his side in his work. It is a familiar thing; but when you think of it, it is a thing for wonder and admiration. She pays a heavy price. Children are born: the time comes for the children to “go home”; and then she either follows the children and loses her husband, or stays with her husband and loses her children. But she pays the price quietly; and we take the payment for granted. That is one side of the matter; and it has its sadness. But there is also another; and that has its sadness too. It is the Englishwoman living overseas with her husband who is one of the barriers—subtly, unconsciously, but all the more powerfully—to ready understanding and easy sympathy between the Englishmen who work abroad and the people of the land in which they work.

The fault lies with the man rather than with the woman. Englishmen, more than Frenchmen or Spaniards or Italians, have a strong sense of something which they call “race.” Race is a sadly abused word, which is only safe when it is used by an anthropologist—and not even always then. But we are prone to use it: we cherish an ideal of race purity; we hold to an ideal of uncontaminated whiteness. We do not always keep our faith, but we keep it tolerably well; and there is wisdom and moral prudence about it if we keep it as a control on ourselves. But we extend it; and we make it a sort of control on our women-folk. Starting with an idea of chivalry, which is not necessarily the highest tribute to them, we desire to keep them fenced and protected: we want them to live the English life, with all its amenities and sanctities, apart from the outer world. Here again there is wisdom and practical sense—if the thing is done within measure. Tropical climates are not temperate climates; and the position of women in the life of the East cannot be the position of women in the life of the West. But an *enclave* of English social life and secluded English womanhood may be an exotic thing; and if conservatories are useful for plants, they are not necessarily useful for human beings.

On the top of this comes the action of the Englishwomen themselves. Women have a gift for creating “society,” with its



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and at the same instant the voice of the countryside changes. The chorus of the frogs stops dead, and the chorus of the larks succeeds it. In this enchanted atmosphere, I seem to be immune from footsoreness or fatigue as I race the sunrise up the slopes of the extinct volcano whose crater now holds the Alban Lake. The race is won and the journey over when I stand on the western lip of the brim, below the dome of Castel Gandolfo, and watch the sun burst into the open sky above the peak of Monte Cavo, unchecked in his course by the arduous leap which he has just made over the Appennines. . . .

As I sat crumpled up in the first morning tram that would take me back to Rome from Albano, I observed that the wilderness which I had crossed the night before was all desecrated in broad daylight by the works of Man. Between the villa-residences of Frascati and the tenements that now mask the Lateran, the face of the Campagna is disfigured to-day by airports and wireless-stations and racecourses. What meant these diurnal portents of vulgar blatant life which had been invisible in the moonlight? Did they signify that History moves in some vast Hindu cycle? Would this sordid modern world turn to dust like the sordid ancient world and, turning, leave an unearthly beauty behind it, a beauty like the rainbow-hued discolorations with which Time has redeemed the cheapness of that prosaic Roman commercial glassware? Would the hay-swathes one day re-bury the Great North Road and a new Faith issue from catacombs beneath the ruins of Hendon and Barnet? "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." But my mind recoiled from the mental vistas that opened here before it. I had seen and thought enough for a night and a day. When the tram came to a standstill at its Roman terminus, I only knew that I was tired at last.

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE.

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gatherings, its rules, its round of activities, its codes. The active genius of Englishwomen has been busy in this way. Wherever they have settled, they have organised a whole system of social life, partly for themselves, but mainly for the leisure hours of their men. Mr. Rudyard Kipling has described it: the pens of many writers have been busy upon it. To adorn a life of exile (if indeed it be exile, for that is the question) is an inevitable impulse; and it would be absurd to cast stones at an impulse which has its sad side as well as its gay. But the more the impulse works, the more it accentuates the tendency towards an *enclave*. The development of social life is also the development of social distinctions. Women, who are the great creators of social etiquette, may also be the creators of social barriers. Their society-forming instinct, operating under conditions and within limits largely fixed by men, may be a danger as well as a grace.

It would be absurd to contend that work must engulf life. No man can do his best work unless he has a quiet garden into which he can retreat for rest and recreation. A wife, in the very passion of her devotion, is anxious to make such a garden for her husband. But a communal garden—and a communal garden with rails round it—is conspicuous. And a conspicuous "Society," even in its own country, is not an asset to social peace. It is a grave question whether we ought to export it with us when we go abroad. "Society" is always a little unnatural; and when it is exported, it becomes a little more unnatural, even for ourselves. Playing our social parts under other skies, we may play them a little hectically. If we become a little more unnatural, even for ourselves, we may seem entirely unnatural to others.

In day-dreams one may imagine an Indian service (but the problem is not only Indian) on the model of the old Templars or Hospitallers—a company under a vow, living a monastic life. That is beyond the compass of human nature; and it might be inhuman. In day-dreams, again, one may imagine a competitive selection of the women who can go abroad into the Empire, as one has a competitive selection of the men; or at any rate one may dream of a year's probationary training for the women, corresponding to the men's probation. That, again, is a foolish dream; for natural selection will have its own way, and a wife who duplicates her husband, or is made to imitate his training and interests, may be the worse wife. There is no heroic (or rather, sham-heroic) remedy to be found in the shape of some new sort of institution. Sparta is with us; and we must simply adorn Sparta. As Aristotle says when he criticises Plato's heroic remedies, the real way of improvement is to leave institutions alone, and to get "the right philosophy and customs" to work.



It is this matter of "philosophy and customs" which Miss Freya Stark discusses in the pages which follow. We discussed the matter together in an Italian hill-town last autumn; and she has set down, in the light of her experiences in the East, the thoughts which have come to her mind. I subscribe readily and entirely to what she says. I am sure that women will readily embrace a new "philosophy," and gladly alter old "customs," if we men will only cease from our masculine refrain:

There are some things  
Which are not done.

It is the habit, and the pride, of the English wife at home to do social work (in another sense of the word "social") during the working-day of her husband. Such work counts more, for thousands of wives, than any sort of social round. There is nothing high-brow or goody-goody about such work. Any woman with an active mind and a warm heart must necessarily wish to be about some real and genuine business of activity. Indeed it is already on record that such work is afoot in the East. It will go further—if only men will drop some masculine taboos, and cease to regard women as either coquettes "for hours of rest" or nurses for those sad occasions when "anguish wrings the brow." Woman is the companion and fellow-worker rather than the coquette or the nurse—though she will always remain the nurse (and perhaps the coquette) whenever and wherever there is need. She has an instinct for social work as well as the social round; and provided that social work is not allowed to become merely one of the fashions of the social round, and has no touch or taint of patronage, it will be a genuine liberation of the gifts and capacities of the Englishwoman serving the Empire abroad. Nor will it only be her liberation. It will be a new and singularly effective way of conciliation and sympathy between the English stock and the native peoples. When women understand one another, the battle is won, and the way is easy for men.

ERNEST BARKER.

## II

When Disraeli discovered the British Empire, it was so large and strong and unassailable that it overshadowed the acquiescent world with no effort of its own, with no tightening of the muscles as it were—self-conscious indeed, but with the careless, assured absence of organisation that came from its security. This static prosperity is no more. The ideas that underlay it have altered, and outward forms, following in their clumsy dangerous way, are

altering also. The whole thing moves, like a stream of lava rolling slowly under its half-coagulated crust: the heaving, wrinkled surface threatens at any moment to crack and break: our experts surround it anxiously: put up here a dyke, there smooth away an obstacle: watch where the crust appears most thin and agitated: in fact do all they can. That it should move—that at any rate it does so—is now obvious to all: to keep it from doing so destructively is our concern.

Meanwhile the process, disturbing our easy tenure, makes us revise our tools and methods; and we are gradually co-ordinating them into something like a homogeneous machine to carry out policies which are becoming ever more centralised and unified. The strain, we feel, has only begun, and we shall need increasingly whatever strength is in us, not to repress in the old Imperial way, but to control and so to say absorb the new situations as they arise. Our chief instrument is, we believe, as good as any in the world, and better than most: it is the human element which we draft into our Services and which continues to do its work with a philosophy all its own, depressed but not crushed by democratic politics, and bearing with experienced equanimity kicks both foreign and domestic.

But we are becoming very slowly and reluctantly aware that modern empire must be organised on a broader basis than that of small specialised groups, however efficient. Trade and industry, education, journalism and religion are being consciously used by other nations as instruments of government or penetration. We have a prejudice against such policies, and feel about them rather like the Italian *condottieri* when the French armies interrupted their gentlemanly warfare with business-like massacre. But we are being forced by the circumstances themselves. Willingly or unwillingly we find that imperial policy, like a good stroke at tennis, requires the whole impetus of the body behind it. And we know that if we are still to lead in the world, we shall soon need every resource that we can muster.

In this connection we have one asset which is unique to our race. This is the British woman. No other has had quite the same training or developed quite the same qualities. She has been formed by a discipline, now centuries old, of hardship abroad or separation at home, which has combined with a Puritan tradition of self-control to weave as it were a steel thread into the very fibres of her character. After nearly three hundred years of such training in all quarters of the globe, it is now taken as a matter of course that our women can bear danger and responsibility, discomfort of climate and loneliness, almost as well as their menfolk. We take it for granted. But when we



glance at the colonies of other races we notice how comparatively few women of this type they contain. Those that there are, are almost entirely confined to towns, and to climates where conditions resemble the European: and, above all, the average time of their residence is short. In Latin countries the civil servant usually waits to marry till he can exchange his foreign service for a post at home: good positions are frequently sacrificed because the wife cannot bear a long separation from her own relatives; and the thought of sending the children home to be educated while the mother stays abroad would hardly be entertained. When we look upon these conditions we realise that the Englishwoman is quite a peculiar factor in the Empire.

With all this, it is depressing to notice that our unpopularity in foreign lands appears to coincide with her appearance. It comes about quite naturally, and is not altogether her fault. Perhaps it is nobody's fault: it might indeed be argued to be a result of domestic virtues. The explanation appears to be that our men, when still in their solitary condition, homeless, clubless, in a strange land, surrounded by no social palisade, naturally mingle with the people they live among, and become known and liked. They are usually our best men, too, selected by some special interest, knowledge or adventurous spirit, to go where the path is yet little trodden. They almost always find a welcome. Wherever they have been, they have spread our influence and enhanced our prestige, so that it becomes quite astonishing to compare their accounts with the depressing atmosphere which now surrounds British communities living in the self-same *milieu* which was once so kind. Nor is it a change which has been slow of accomplishment, for it has visibly happened in many places during our lifetime.

To ascribe it to Eve entirely would be as summary as Genesis and very absurd. Eve by herself does not, as a matter of fact, do any harm. If she lives in some place so remote that there are not enough British Eves to form a society, she can give as good and sometimes even better imperial service than her menfolk, especially in the East, where none but she has free entry into the homes. The harm is done when she is so numerous that she can make a little world of her own. It is a pleasant little world. The damage is made possible, as I say, by our domestic virtues. It is so pleasant that it gradually absorbs all but the men's business hours. Incongruous elements are excluded. We make a miniature National Home for the British, and we all know the potential mischief of National Homes! After this we may take it as an axiom that no amount of administrative justice will turn anyone who is socially snubbed into a friend. This point has,

of course, been brought forward very often; and the reply is made that intercourse with other races is so difficult, and holds so many disadvantages, that things are better as they are. I have not experience enough to enter into such a question. I am prepared to believe that it is so easy to say or do the wrong thing abroad that unless one has a full sense of the responsibility, it may be better to say and do nothing at all. This is not my point, however. My plea is not that our women should necessarily *mix* more with the people they happen to be among, but that they should study to *know* something more about them.

It seems absurd that while the men in all our Services are being constantly instructed and admonished to study the language, customs and susceptibilities of the races they have to deal with, their wives can and do make as many *faux pas* as they like: if they do not, it is entirely due to their own merit and initiative, not to any force of public opinion behind them. Being a democratic nation, unprovided with the fashionable Dictator, we cannot very well supply our service man with the wife we consider appropriate, nor even insist that the lady should undergo a suitable examination before the engagement is announced in the *Morning Post*. The matter is not one to be imposed, and if we were up against any real reluctance or incapacity, there would be little use in saying anything about it: we should have to resign ourselves, as we do to an indifferent housemaid who has married our excellent gardener. But this is not the case at all. A great number of the women scattered over the Empire would like to know more of the conditions around them: if they realised that such knowledge could make them really more useful to their country, the majority would be willing to take some trouble about it: they are held back by a silly fashion and no more.

I had an opportunity to test the matter last winter, when I was spending my time in one of the cities of the East. As I was poor, and also busy with a study of the language, I settled myself in the house of a native shoemaker and his wife. I did this quite innocently, and only discovered after some little while that it was considered peculiar: in fact it is not usually done. My own friends and family were much amused when they heard about it, and warned me that I should be an outcast, an absolute pariah, among British officialdom. The intolerance, narrowmindedness, and stupidity of the average official's wife were impressed upon me. I was prepared for the worst. I found, however, that these strictures were really rather unfair. After a little natural hesitation, not surprising in the circumstances, the slandered ladies were perfectly charming and showed an admirable independence in being nice to me. I was not of the flock. I was outside the



enclosure, browsing the flowers and thorns of Experience in a contented and apparently reprehensible solitude. Remembering the "group-psychology" of which we hear so much now, I was not surprised by sidelong glances from some among the virtuous but less imaginative matrons.

What did surprise me was to discover how many of these ladies, whom the highbrow considers to be completely taken up by bridge, would have liked to join me and nibble at the Herb of Understanding outside the official railings. To look into the world about you is after all a natural human craving. Why should the British official's wife, alone of her species, be deprived of so innocent a pastime? She deprives herself, you will say very justly. There is nobody in the world, not even her husband, who would really object to her studying whatever she likes in the life that goes on around her. It is merely just "not done."

Consider the force of such a taboo. A young bride comes out, full of ardour and good intentions, with a grammar of whatever the local language may be ready in her suitcase, and the firm resolve to learn and know as much as possible of the life of the people among whom her husband's work is to lie. If she joins him in some remote district far from her own kind, she carries out the project and becomes a useful member of the Empire. But if she finds herself in a British community of any size at all, only a quite unusual amount of character and perseverance will enable her to do so. She will have very many social calls; the business of running a house will be found to take up more time and to be more difficult than at home; and the drudgery inseparable from the learning of anything new also needs real enthusiasm to make her face it. She would, however, overcome all these natural inherent obstacles if this were expected of her, if she were smiled upon by the general approval, and if she felt that she was making a really useful effort for the good of our British name. But not at all. Unless she is very careful, she will be considered eccentric and incomprehensible and—strangest of all—she may even run the risk of being thought unpatriotic. Small wonder that after a year or two her good intentions have vanished like smoke, leaving only a faint regret behind. This is deplorable because there is really no reason for it. It is a mere fashion which even those who impose it would no longer justify in so many words. It is in fact theoretically exploded. But this does not prevent it from continuing in practice, and perhaps it may do so for a very long time. And meanwhile time is precious.

We are no longer in a position to neglect the instruments we possess: far less those human instruments which are capable of doing harm as well as good. Next to our officials themselves,

their wives are perhaps the greatest asset we have; within their own community—and they have rarely been asked to think of anything beyond that—they show continuously, and as a matter of course, the sterling stuff they are made of. If we raised the standard one degree so as to embrace a wider horizon, not in action, but in point of view, most of them would welcome and be found equal to the change.

What might be accomplished in a positive way is beyond the scope of this article; nor do I wish to be accused of "feminism" or any "ism" at all. All I plead is that we should be encouraged to devote some time and energy to the study of not doing harm. It is a modest ambition, but not so very easy. It postulates a knowledge of what other people think and say. In all the world there is a right and a wrong way of saying things, unfortunately not everywhere the same. The London manner in Timbuctoo is often very unsatisfactory. Our men are taught with great care to study the Timbuctoo manner if that is where they happen to be sent. Our women may do so if they like, but it is not a fashionable thing to do. I think it would be to the interest of the Empire if we made it as fashionable as possible.

FREYA STARK.



## THE DOLLAR AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TRADE.

THE world is at a loss to know why the United States of America, for years the buttress of prosperity, should, in spite of their phenomenal success, which has resulted in monopolising half the world's gold supply, have suddenly been plunged into a maelstrom of depression more searching, more devastating, than any experienced in past time, either in America or elsewhere. They had escaped the ravages of war and had, indeed, profited largely by three years of neutrality which filled their coffers with money and encouraged rapid expansion of industries. Undoubtedly the causes of the slump are deep and not easy to analyse, but few can doubt that the monetary machine has functioned so badly that it has not been possible to prevent a disintegration of the economic system, accompanied by a downward movement in the value of land, property and commodities, which has clipped the wings of every capitalist, large and small, and has brought great suffering to men of small means. Indeed, no fact in the economic history of the world is more arresting than this sudden transition of the United States of America from the position of a debtor to that of a creditor nation. Fostered by exorbitant war profits, within four years her industries underwent vast expansion which brought the country into the front rank of exporters. In the meanwhile re-equipment of plant and harmonious relations between capital and labour consolidated industry and buttressed it against attack from foreign competitors, whose strength had been sapped by the war. High wages coincided with low production costs, fostering a vast output which scattered riches amongst all ranks of the population and created a spending power in excess of that of any country in the world. While Europe paused to take breath on the conclusion of hostilities, America went ahead by leaps and bounds and accumulated capital on a scale beyond the dreams of avarice. To many it appeared that a new era had arisen, that America stood on a pedestal quite apart from the ruck of humanity; in short, it was thought that nothing could ever disturb this halcyon dream. A new doctrine was promulgated to the effect that the higher the wages and the greater one's personal expenditure, the greater would be the general prosperity. Saving was scorned, indeed it was redundant, since a widespread system of credit facilitated the acquisition of both necessities and luxuries by a vast extension of the hire purchase system which actually anticipated future demand and filled to overflowing the order books of every factory within the Union.

A favourable settlement of war debts attracted to New York the





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