

Woman: her charm and power
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Женщина: ее очарование и сила
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Abstract: *the article is focused on woman's role and status in the society of the 19th century, Great Britain.*

Аннотация: *в статье рассматривается роль и статус женщины в обществе 19 века, Великобритания.*

Keywords: *feminism, female education, marriage, religion, purity.*

Ключевые слова: *феминизм, женское образование, брак, религия, чистота.*

Each epoch is renowned for its outstanding people, unbelievable inventions, historical events, and every generation of that epoch has its minority fighting for changes in their way of existing.

During the 19th century men and women's roles in life became more keenly defined than at any time in history.

One of feminism's definitions can be placed and described by Alice Jardin in these words: «Feminism is a subject for women who are, precisely, its subjects, the people who make it; it is their affair. Feminism is also a subject for men, what it is about obviously concerns them; they have to learn to make it their affair, to carry it through into our lives» [2].

From this point of view it is clearly seen that the idea of feminism includes undoubtedly two participants: woman and man.

From human's first society, every woman was in a state of bondage to some man, because she was of immense importance to him and she had less muscular strength than he did. Nevertheless, life cannot stand still, it progresses and the things that many centuries ago may seem usual one cannot be unchanged and overlooked in the beginning of 19th century.

Woman felt a duty to change the things around, as the men did. She wanted to make humanity much better and happier for her.

As the 19th century progressed, men more and more went to their place of work (the factory, shop or office). Wives, daughters and sisters were left at home all day to oversee the domestic duties that were made by servants or even if the family was from working class, woman had to look after the house herself.

It was quite obvious that intellectually women were inferior to men. «The female education...was superficial, trifling, and babyish» [1]. How could they be developed if they were staying at home? Education was a delaying block for women, keeping them from having equal status in society. They were destined to play on the piano, draw pictures, knit, work a design on linen and so on, no mental work at all. In those times no one wanted to be called «blue-stocking» (the name given to woman, who really wanted to be educated). These women, in that cause, thought to be unfeminine, because they are not inferior to men any more, they are superior. In order to make women stay uneducated, doctors published this kind of research «that too much study actually had a damaging effect on the ovaries, turning attractive young women into dried-up prunes» [3]. No doubt, such changes in education would entail serious consequences and no one wanted to have them.

Women were expected to be pure, religious, domestic and submissive. However, none of these ideals would be achieved through education. A woman could not fill her preordained place in society if she wasting her time gaining knowledge. Education for women was thought to shatter the social balance of the time.

For many women, in the 19th century, to get knowledge is the only way to get bread, and still more from that instinctive craving for light which in many is stronger than the craving for bread. So this question of woman's education is far from being one of intellectual progress merely; it is a question of deep moral import, and enters far into the heart of society, affecting the best interests of men as well as those of women. The connection of woman's education with some of the most serious social problems is closer than might be supposed.

After a while, not out of a blue, women started trying to gain the same equals rights as men had. They demanded the right to vote, the right to have a political voice, to work outside the home. They were trying to go over again the system under which they were really suffering or not, whether they can live and stand another way of living, whether «they have fallen into the hands of God or man» [4].

Josephine Butler used remarkable words to depict this epoch: «Be just before you are chivalrous», many a woman is tempted to exclaim, when she finds every door through which she might pass to a subsistence, closed in her face with expressions of deference. Signs have not been wanting which have justified the saying «that a selfish disregard of the interests of women, and indifference to this sufferings, is the great national sin of England,—and all national sins, if unrepented, meet with their punishment sooner or later» [4].

Most of the people thought education to be a real road for woman's emancipation. «It is to education that we must first look for the emancipation of women from the industrial restrictions or a bygone age. In the meantime I may surely say that no lover of his country, of justice or of God, can see this misery unmoved» [4].

Josephine Butler considers being two advocates' classes of the improvement of the education and women's condition. The first class was trying to see woman from the domestic point of view. Their opponent, contrary to the first class, confess woman to be a man like. It seems that both classes of advocates had no success to see something which was really worth to be reviewed and focused on, because that were their utterances on that topic and not actions.

Marriage and sexuality were greatly overlooked. In the 19th century a young girl was not supposed to think of finding a husband. Women desired to get married because it allowed them to become mothers rather than to pursue sexual satisfaction.

The doctor, William Acton, perfectly declared that «The majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind» [3].

Girls usually married in their early to mid-20s. Generally, the husband would be five years older and also produced some financial security. A young man had to be able to prove that he earned enough money to support a wife and his future family.

Young girls usually had no choice but to stay chaste until marriage. There were definitely some women that really wanted to be able to do something useful in their society, for instance, Elizabeth Barrett «used illness as an excuse to retreat to a room at the top of her father's house and write poetry. In 1847 Charlotte Bronte put strong feelings about women's limited role into the mouth of her heroine Jane Eyre» [3], but under the surface women simply stayed at home, never trying to rebel against old traditions and foundations.

Moreover, in those times many respectable men resorted to use prostitutes. It was quite easy to find a woman in some districts whom you could pay for sex. However, syphilis and other sexual diseases were widespread, in that case husbands involuntarily passed on the infection to their wives. As a result people were dying.

The prostitute was some kind of a shadow that undoubtedly existed in the society. The prostitute was a worker in the economic market place, receiving cash for her work. Doctors such as Acton were highly worried by the problem the prostitute presented, in particular the way she spread sexual disease amongst the male population. «For this reason Contagious Diseases Act were instituted from 1860 which allowed, in certain towns, for the forced medical examination of any woman who was suspected of being a sex worker. If she was found to be infected she was placed in a «Lock Hospital» until she was cured. A reform movement led by Josephine Butler vigorously campaigned for a repeal of the acts, arguing that it was male clients, as much as the prostitutes, who were responsible for the problems associated with prostitution» [3].

Many charities were founded in order to save prostitutes. Charles Dickens even worked together with the philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts to set up «Magdalen House» which would prepare girls for a new life in Australia. However, prostitution continued to flourish for as long as there were men who were prevented by economy from marrying until their late 20th, and women who were driven in a corner, because there was no more opportunity to earn money and raise their own children in another way.

From this point follows another, which becomes a central issue of 19th century too. It is the birth control. The debates around birth control and limitation of fertility led to the one more conflict between man and woman. «Not surprisingly, the attempt to restrict the number of children in any one family to avoid overpopulation was seen as a bogey raised by political economists to avoid dealing with the fundamental problems of wealth and poverty. Thus feminists of 19th century were opposed to birth control as it was presented, but in favour of woman's right to self-determination, and hence in favour of abstinence» [5]. Abstinence was thought to be the only way out of birth control. Birth control gave men the ability to increase their exploitation of women and that as well gave women power to determine their own lives. «Reproductive freedom could be, and was, achieved by women controlling their own fertility, not by control imposed from outside by population pressures» [5].

Then comes a question of woman's purity.

«As a general rule women are purer than men» [1], why is it so and what woman can be a pure one, which excellent and rare qualities she must have. Firstly, «pure woman» is a woman of virtue, who is pure in mind and in body, this woman does not commit a sin against morals, she is pure as Mary is. «Being pure in heart is about knowing and loving, being in relationship with God» (статья). Robert Downes even insists on the fact that the man is the person who spoils woman, but this purity a natural one. Woman is born with it and cannot exist without it, or she will not be a woman then. This characteristic differs her from men's personality.

Woman is your own guardian, but can man pretend to this right of ownership? In those days the answer would be «yes». How can she be a free creature if «she merged her individuality in that of man»? [1]. Moreover, she accepts her destiny, saying nothing. Her obedience is the key of her life, without it everything will collapse and no purity at all. Out of purity comes obedience.

Woman was thought to be «The Angel in the House», she was the only one who could create an atmosphere of love and brightness at home, she produced a sweet music which filled the house with indescribable feeling of peace and care. «She is Love's form» [1]. This Angel can be unseen, but it undoubtedly exists in family's heart and soul. She sacrifices herself for the sake of family.

If a woman is a pure being, then Christian purity is a matter of totally committing your life to God. «Christianity maybe said to have conferred on woman a new soul and a new destiny» [1]. It saved woman from being man's slaver and plaything. It made her to be his friend and partner. She is not under the oppression, she is alive.

Religion is more natural to woman than to men. It is the air for woman, she breathes it. «Woman is superior to man in the strength of her religious emotions» [1].

In the Victorian period, women undertook unpaid work in philanthropy.

«So, whilst deemed inferior by the Church, at this juncture women were seen to be useful in that female communities, established for the practice of charitable work, could constitute evangelical machines for the spread of Catholicism» [6]. Women had to care of the poor and sick people, education of children and girls, domestic duties for the priesthood.

Downes deliberately chose the words «charm» and «power» for the book's title. Women most of all give men and all the people around a real understanding of their nature. This nature was hidden, was hardly visible to human eye. Her power was under her charm, her power is beauty, helping her to survive in those times. Power to suffer, to sacrifice herself for the sake of loved people (man and children). Moreover, power which means struggle, emancipation, she is the only one who can help herself to gain feet and to go forward in spite of everything. Charm, in this case, is the resources, means helping her to receive the things she wants.

«Neither should it be forgotten that the work of woman is needed in our world as well as the work of man, if the cycle of human labor and of human service is to be complete» [1].

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