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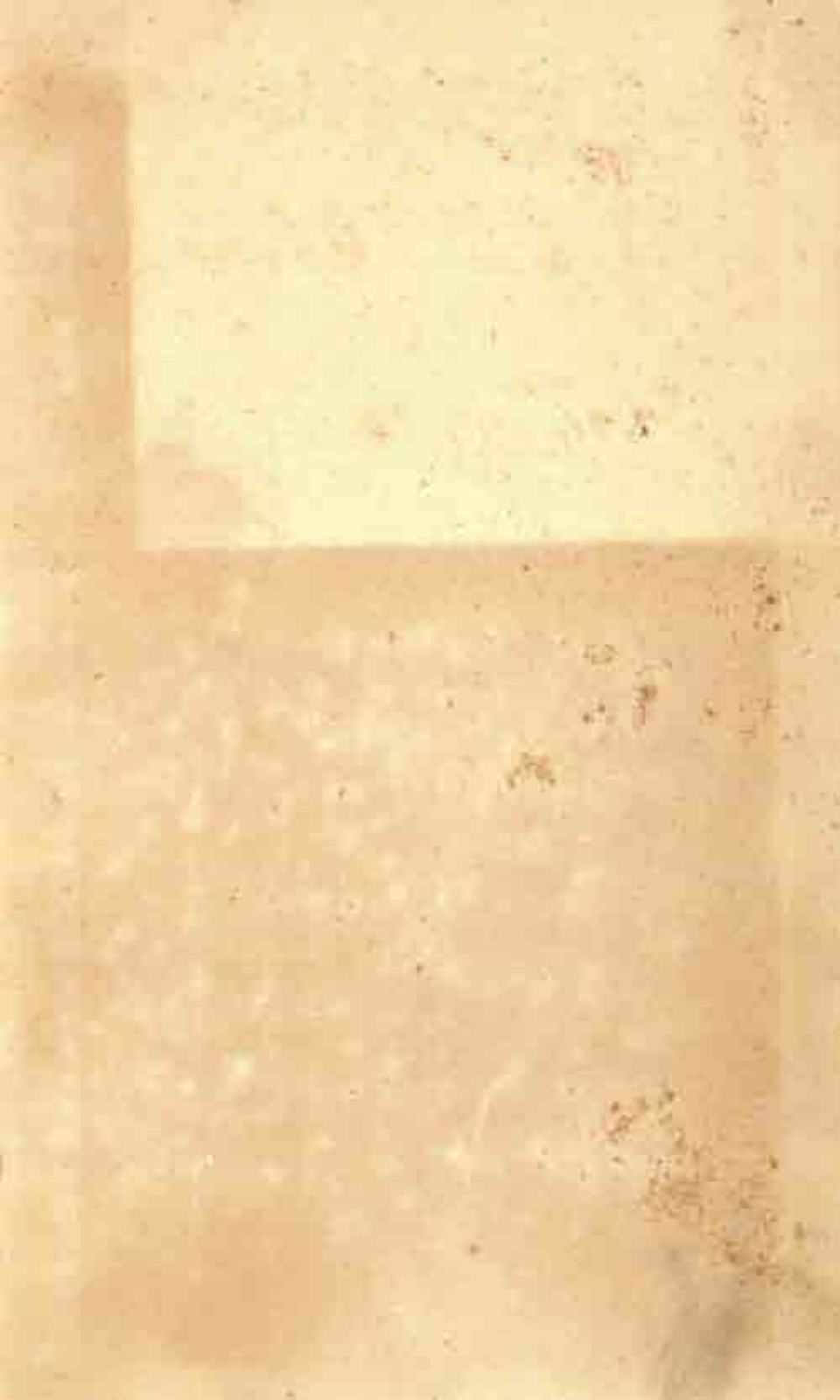
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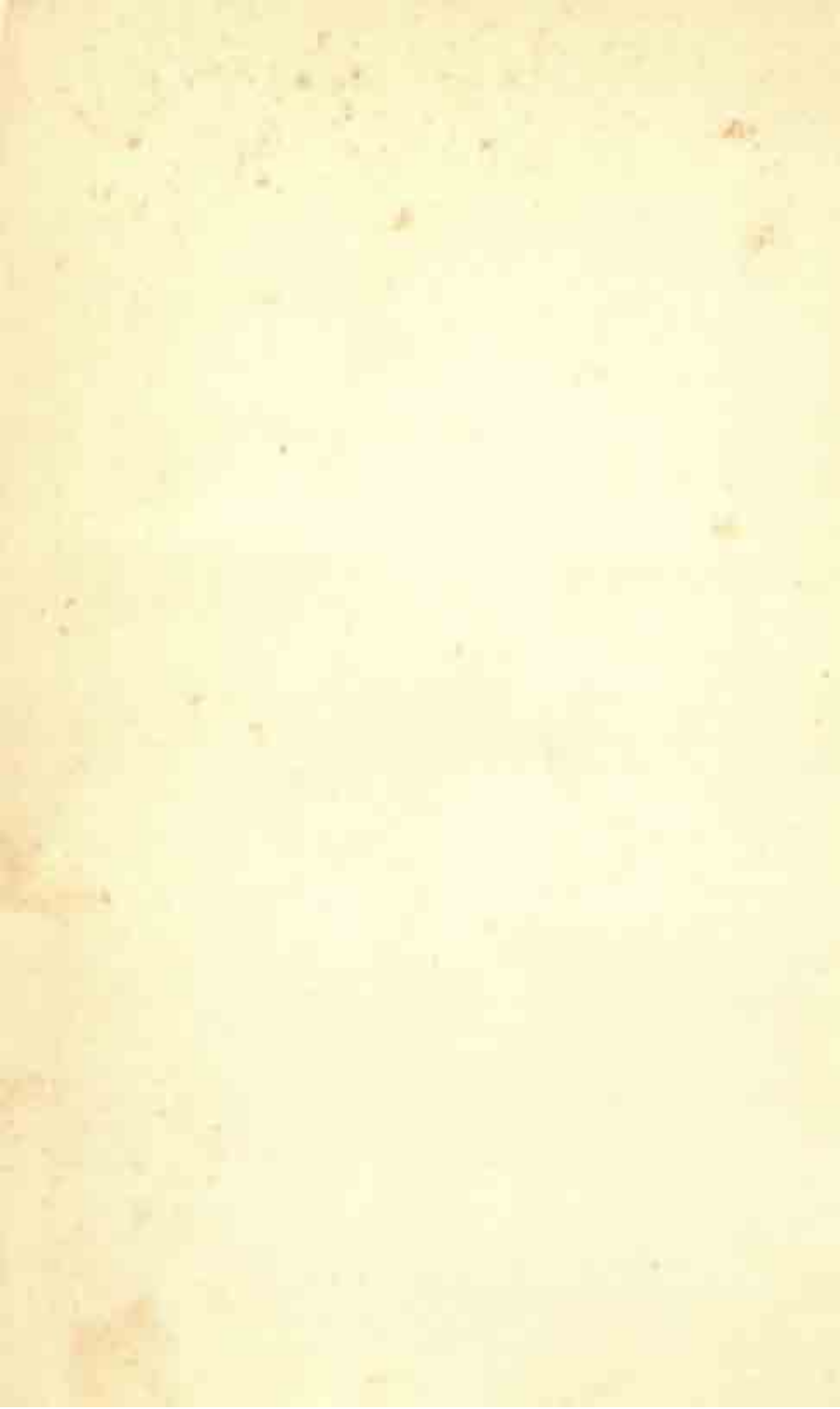
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WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY



# WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

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CHARLES SELTMAN

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"As I sat watching Everyman at the Charterhouse,  
I said to myself why not Everywoman?"

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## *Preface*

Book titles are sometimes provocative, and perhaps this one deserves the epithet. If it does, one must be precise about terms of reference. 'Women.' There is no need to attempt a definition. We are always with them, and they with us. Fortunately. But 'Antiquity' should be, for our purpose, defined. It begins in the remoteness of palaeolithic culture; it ends with the Council of Nicaea, when the Emperor Constantine sat down to hear the bishops, embattled in their factions, argue, dogmatise, and declaim. My aim in the chapters which follow has been mainly that of a collector and recorder, for I have tried to stand in the wings and let the tragi-comedy of women in the ancient world play itself through. Obviously my final chapter is outside this frame. And yet one must gather the threads, observe what history has woven for womankind, and, in fine, assess the fabric of the web as the curtain falls. Inevitably this book is mainly about women in those Mediterranean civilisations which are the roots of ours, but Primitive and Near-Eastern peoples who affected even remotely our background have been briefly considered in early chapters. The net would have been flung altogether too widely had I taken in the life of women among the Northern barbarians and the outer Provincials of the Roman Empire, or Eastern peoples like Persians and Parthians. On the other hand, without my last chapter, no assessing of the Western world's treatment of women, no summing up, would have been possible.

Thanks are due, as always, to many who helped with suggestions; especially to Monica Beament, Katherine

Barrett, John Seltman, and R. B. Whitehead, all patient listeners; also to Michael Carroll for some Sicilian photographs; and to Mr. Jean Charbonneaux for his gift of the photograph reproduced on the jacket of this edition.

In the pages which follow, frequent reference is made to 'The Church' and to 'Christendom'. Readers will, I trust, understand that these words are meant to refer to Western Christendom between the age of Constantine and that of Erasmus. The words are not to be taken as applied either to the Greek Orthodox Church, or to the Anglican Church, or to any of the Reformed Churches which have come into being in Europe and North America since the 16th century.

C. S.

*Cambridge, 1955*

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Femina Sapiens*

It was in the Dordogne eighteen years ago, one early September day, rich with warmth and fresh with a western breeze from Biscay, that I met a schoolmaster from a village which was neighbour to Les Eyzies-de-Tayac. He was a big man, far different from a Provençal, more like an Irishman than a Norman or Breton. Golden-reddish, not hairy, but downy like some Celtic peasant in Eire or a crofter in the Scottish Highlands. The situation and variety of the famous Dordogne caves had profoundly impressed one who, until that time, knew about palaeolithic mankind only from books. Cro-Magnon man became of a sudden real; but the interpreter to me on that day, over a bottle of the local Monbazillac, was the village schoolmaster, born there, living there for half a century, who was able in strange fashion to reconstruct the life of those strange primitives. Indeed, he seemed able to envisage more than their mode of life, for, after his own fashion, he proceeded to interpret their feelings, hopes, anxieties, deathly fears, and—above all—their dark frustrations. The whole emotional difference between male and female was clear to him in terms of palaeolithic man. Possibly some part of his views would be discounted, or even rebutted, by a younger expert prehistorian of to-day. But there was certainly value in his sensitive interpretation of cave psychology, and therefore it is worth setting down in the following paragraphs an account of what this man explained to me.

Of course what follows is lightly leavened by my own later reflections based on conversations with other friends and experts.

You must envisage a cave of some size suitable to contain comfortably from twenty to fifty people. The cave is one of many in this long valley, and each is inhabited, while each is the property of the biggest male within it. The owner-males form a kind of tribe, and at certain times there occurs by agreement the tribal council. Here in this valley there was one of these cave-holders who was Chief, for things happened then as they do now, and the man gifted with leadership and imagination led the others. Only the need to hunt big game, like mammoth, bison, and wild boar, would normally require a council meeting. Economically such animals supplied so much in addition to edible meat, for their bones were turned to a score of different uses and their hides were quite as desirable; even their guts were needful to make good bowstrings, and the long, matted hair could be beaten into felt. Yet hunting and killing these powerful beasts with nothing but palaeolithic weapons involved dangers, planning, experience, and skill; casualties were many, and the main occupational disease of the Stone Age hunter was presumably gangrene. It is thought that the expectation of life in those remote days was no more than forty years.

The life of women in such a society of hunters must have been far different from that of the men. Their time would be spent in the cave or not far from its entrance, where they might cultivate a limited number of edible grasses and vegetables, and scavenge for nuts, roots, and fruits. When one tries to imagine the structure of such a cave-family one can think of two possibilities: firstly, the senior male (whose property the cave was) might have a series of wives



from the oldest at twenty-four to the youngest at twelve, among whom there would inevitably exist a kind of harem-like jealousy productive of much unhappiness; secondly, the whole cave-family group may have lived in what zoologists call a 'clone', in which the women were shared in common by the men. In the framework of our present society it is very hard to imagine that such a state of affairs could be thought normal, yet we have to remember that there was one part of the ancient world where, as recently as 55 B.C., such a practice was looked upon as essentially correct. Julius Caesar in Book V, Chapter II, of his *Conquest of Gaul* has the following comment on the manners and customs of the ancient Britons:

They wear their hair long and shave the whole of their bodies except the head and the upper lip. Wives are shared between groups of ten or twelve men, especially between brothers and between fathers and sons; but the offspring of these unions are counted as the children of the man with whom a particular woman co-habited first.

The passage just quoted has been a great difficulty to generations of schoolmasters teaching elementary Latin by way of Caesar in the Third and Fourth Forms. Some pedants among them have too frequently taken the line that Caesar misunderstood the whole situation and invented this story. Anthropologists, however, can account for numerous other similar cases in the history of man's development, and this British narrow family group appears to have presented a repetition within a civilised framework of an habitual custom which may have prevailed in savage society in palaeolithic times.

When the men from a cave went off to join a hunting party which might keep them away for days on end, the

women, left in the cave with the children, must have been the prey to a good deal of anxiety, having often to kill time while waiting for shouts from the valley that told of the men's return; and the men came back laden with booty, and at times with little thought for anything but sleep. Then it was that the hard work began for the women, leading up to the feast of meat, when the men were awakened. Yet there was no special rhythm about these feminine actions, such as there was in the precise co-operation of hunters in forest or weald from which the men had just returned, and thus it came about that among palaeolithic hunter-tribes the men were planners and the women improvisers. Both were needed, but this marked difference between them caused man—and still causes him—to be exasperated at woman's unpunctuality, and causes woman to be irritated by man's fussiness. It is interesting to read Aristophanes' comment in Athens of the 5th century B.C.: Lysistrata is waiting for the women who have promised to turn up for an important meeting, and Aristophanes causes her to say to her friends, "Oh, my dear, you see, they're typical Athenian girls—always too late in everything they do".<sup>1</sup>

Long ago such characteristics must have been developed and fixed. The unpunctual cave-man who fell short of proper tribal co-operation died quickly; but the cave-woman, by force of circumstances, had no inducement for a precise regard of time which dominated her men, and so her men never quite knew what she would do next. Indeed, woman has always been able to maintain her right to unpredictability, and this, which is really part of her charm, has supplied her with a perpetual strategic advantage over the predictable ways and thoughts of her males.

<sup>1</sup> *Lysistrata*, lines 56 f.

These reflections have been set down because, by explaining certain temperamental difficulties between men and women—quite as important as their physical differences—it may help one to understand better the pattern of conflict and adjustment which seems to run through most of antiquity. At the point where the ancient world gave way to the mediæval, an unprecedented wave of misogyny appeared to strike Christendom in Europe, but the flood which this wave caused fortunately subsided with the beginning of the Renaissance, and the tide has continued to ebb ever since.

The primitives<sup>1</sup> who so far have been briefly considered all belonged to some section of *Homo sapiens*; they were scattered widely in Europe, and they passed through their simple, sordid, and savage cultures over a period of many millennia. A certain amount of what has been said depends on inferences made from their artifacts, and on permissible comparisons with recent or contemporary human groups which are still in a state of near-savagery. But a reader will want to learn if we can know what the people looked like. Among cave-men many individuals showed the most amazing gifts of using charcoal, ochre, and ruddle to draw lifelike pictures of the wild animals they were wont to hunt; but they rarely depicted themselves, the hunters, and when they did so they frequently used simple geometric forms in which the body was shown as a set of thin rods, while the hunter's bow and arrow or spear were given as much importance in the drawing as was the figure of the man himself. In general, these hunters appear to have been naked and to have worn their hair long. When, however, it comes to the representations of women in the same period,

<sup>1</sup> On their distribution in Africa (outside our terms of reference), see Sonia Cole, *The Prehistory of East Africa* (Pelican), 1954.



the 'art' of the time gives us far more information than it does about the men. This is understandable if the man is the artist, since he is going to portray what is of interest to him.

A few examples may be illustrated in simple line-drawings: *fig. 1* shows a group of several women, a man, and a small ruminant which were drawn at Cogul in the Ebro Valley; *fig. 2* shows a carving in crystalline talc of a female figure discovered at Baoussé-Roussé near Menton, and this figure may be compared with the ivory head of a young girl (*fig. 3*), her hair long and indicated by striations, which was found at Brassempouy in the Landes. Of a very different kind is another group of figures showing women of astonishing fatness, a type commonly known as *steatopygous*, like the carvings discovered at Laussel in the Dordogne. However, the most famous of all these carvings is the celebrated statuette in oölitic limestone found at Willendorf in lower Austria, and known as the 'Venus of Willendorf' (*fig. 4*). In many ways the existence of these drawings and figures—the list of which might be very considerably augmented<sup>1</sup>—requires some explanation. It is safe to reject any belief that they have religious significance, for it is highly improbable that palaeolithic and even early neolithic man had got to a stage when magic was evolving into religion. That these figures may have magical value is probable, especially since the group of women at Cogul (*fig. 1*) would seem to be indulging in some kind of dance for which they wear long skirts—of skins or possibly of grass—though the upper halves of their bodies are bare, and their breasts pendent. But whatever the purpose of

<sup>1</sup> A convenient collection of such things was made as early as 1913 by S. Reinach, *Répertoire de l'Art Quaternaire*. See also Seltman, *C.A.H. Plates* i, p. 8 a, b, c; and for late palaeolithic see p. 16 a, b (our *Fig. 5*).



FIG. 1



FIG. 2

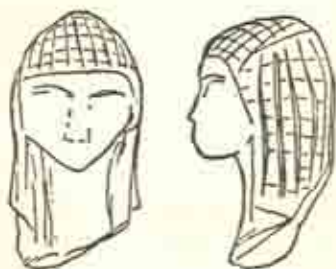


FIG. 3

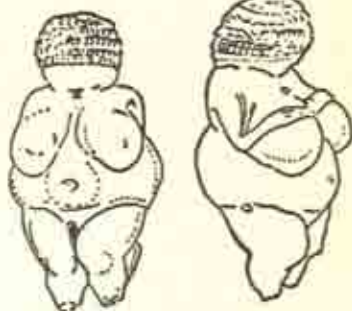


FIG. 4



FIG. 5

these representations, they must indicate what the man who produced them found interesting and desirable. At the present day in parts of Africa, and occasionally in societies of European origin, a preference exists for love-intercourse after the manner of the other mammalia.<sup>1</sup> Since the man's idea of what constitutes feminine beauty is greatly influenced by his thoughts about love, he will most admire the back of his spouse if he makes quadrupedal love, and the front if he acts according to the usual human pattern. By a kind of natural selection, woman is quick to respond in physical type to the admiration of man, and it is fair to conclude that such steatopygous types as the palaeolithic women from Willendorf, Laussel, and other sites indicate customs like those now habitual in parts of the Sudan. By contrast, the drawing at Cogul would seem to depict women of longer and thinner shape, such as is the more usual type of yesterday and to-day. Since there is so great a number of unclothed representations, it is likely that skirts or other coverings were worn only for ceremony or dance, and the inference to be drawn is that no form of covering was worn by either sex except on special occasions.

One can do no more than guess at what sort of dispositions these cave-women may have possessed. We have called them improvisers, in contrast to male planners, and if they were hard and crude, they would have been less so than their males, for they had to cherish their young. Gentleness in women is somehow foreshadowed among the females of the animal world, in which the emotional difference between the sexes is already clear, and we may be sure that the cave man was the fighter and the woman the defender of her brood and her spouse.

<sup>1</sup> See A. C. Kinsey and Associates, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female*, Philadelphia 1953, pp. 363 f.

Ever since the first dawn of thought gleamed upon the dark landscape of instinct, man has regarded women with a mixture of attraction and awe. Woman as the Gate of Life; woman as the Object of Desire: between these two poles have his emotions swung. . . . The body of woman has always been heavy with magic, mysterious as life itself. Somehow it was more deeply embedded in nature than man's own body, more responsive to its rhythms.<sup>1</sup>

From a past so remote and rough, humanity was to evolve slowly until, by the 6th century B.C., its types were already fixed in the same social, intellectual, and emotional patterns which are ours to-day. The journey in time has been a long one, "since the fumbling artist strove to disengage from the reluctant stone the first amulet of fertility in the shape of a woman. Between the Venus of Willendorf and the Venus of Velasquez is a gap big enough to swallow the whole of human history."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Laver, *Homage to Venus* (Faber & Faber), 1948, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 4.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *The Rivers*

As far as the Eurasian Continent was involved, the last Ice Age introduced a long period of delay in the growth of human activity, but men survived somehow near the Midland Sea, and as the ice-cap receded after centuries, they regained freedom of movement and initiative. They were now neolithic men who, though they still hunted, began to domesticate animals. As a result of keeping dogs and ruminants, they began to make certain observations concerning the rhythms of procreation and to discover that, for example, cows, goats, and sheep did not produce young without the co-operation of their appropriate males. The next event was that they began to compare their own actions with those of other mammals, and to discover, to their great astonishment, that they, too, procreated in similar ways. For us it is difficult to realise that while maternity is self-evident, paternity is not necessarily so. Yet we must remember that less than a score of years ago there were intelligent, well-organised, and well-integrated people living in the Pacific islands who calmly denied that there ever was paternity.<sup>1</sup> The Trobriand Islanders, living in an ideal climate, planting a few cereals, and gathering abundant fruits, had no need to domesticate any animals, though they took some interest in the herds of small wild

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they continue to deny it. The Australian aborigines certainly still deny paternity; see Colin Simpson, *Adam in Ochre* (Angus and Robertson), 1953.

pig which moved around their pastures. These kindly people take the view that young persons in their early 'teens very properly indulge in sex-play, and that at a certain age a young woman selects a husband, with whom she co-habits, and who acts as 'nurseman' to such children as she bears, the children being disciplined by, and inheriting from, their maternal uncle. But they stoutly maintain that intercourse does not cause conception. It exists, they hold, purely for pleasure, and any other story is for them the invention of wicked missionaries. As Earl Russell has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> there is no word for 'father' in the Trobriand language because no such concept exists. Missionaries could not get along without such an idea and name, and they were forced to teach the islanders the facts of procreation, which these happy people dismissed laughingly as plain nonsense. When one realises that such a state of affairs has existed in our own day, then one must admit that at some point in time other, remoter, human beings must have held a similar view until they were rather suddenly enlightened by the animals in their possession.

From this discovery other attitudes presently emerged which were, if not quite reflex actions, at any rate reflex attitudes. Sometimes, despite the new discovery, the pattern of life was seen in terms of matrilineal descent. Sometimes a patrilineal pattern evolved, and some wealthy polygamous patriarch controlled the family or tribe, but oddly mixed patterns of society must have occurred in those days, even as they do now in tribal Africa. The Fon of Bikom, ruler of the Kom Tribe in the Cameroons, under British Trusteeship, is the husband of more than a hundred wives. To his tribe this aged chieftain's establishment seems com-

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Marriage and Morals*, 1929, p. 20, commenting on Malinowski's work, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-West Melanesia*.

pletely correct and in accordance with age-long custom. Nevertheless, as has recently been pointed out, descent is under a matrilineal pattern, for one of the chieftain's daughters was the Princess Funkun, with many lovers, who was too proud to take a husband except for the purposes of fathering a future Fon of Bikom and thus winning for herself the privileged position of Queen Mother.<sup>1</sup> Other circumstances might be cited to emphasise the diversity that existed in the lives of the races of men in the earlier Bronze Age as much as it does now. In such simple societies womenfolk had generally no more to complain of than men, for physical and temperamental differences continued to fix the natural occupations of both. Among agricultural people women worked in the fields, as they do now in many countries where a simple peasant culture persists. This has its importance, because such people are well aware of the mysterious connection which exists between women and fertility, and of the desirability that they rather than the men should occupy themselves with the crops which spring from mother earth. From this there arose in ancient times fertility rites which exalted women in the eyes of their menfolk and which gave to many women periodically such splendours and delights as they have scarcely enjoyed since the 4th or 5th centuries of our era.<sup>2</sup> Modern urban persons constantly waste their sympathy on peasant girls and women who seem to them to lead oppressed and servile lives, but in reality those peasants are perfectly content, and if, even in the present day, you get to know something of the lives and thoughts of folk in Delphi, or Mycenae, or the islands of Greece, you may

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Reyher, *The Fon and His Hundred Wives* (Gollancz), 1953; and see *The Times Literary Supplement*, 25th September, 1953, p. 618.

<sup>2</sup> Consider especially the classical Greek Thyiads; see Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, pp. 173 f.



learn far more of the essentials of humanity than you will ever learn in Glasgow, Birmingham, or Knightsbridge. Anyone who has lived, even for a short time, among the Delphians realises that the splendours of the place are enhanced by certain absences, for in that magical village there is neither television nor radio nor even a cinema. But the dwellers in Delphi are happier people by far than their brothers who dwell in the more impoverished suburbs of Athens.

Many archaeologists who are familiar with the Peloponnese will remember the case of a certain Helen who led the normal healthy life of a Greek peasant girl, while possessing at the same time great beauty and personal charm. One year, a wealthy Greek-American turned up and, after negotiations with her parents, claimed Helen as his bride, carried her first to Athens in order to endow her with vulgar clothing unsuited to her gait, and more vulgar cosmetics inappropriate to her complexion. After that minor disaster this paunchy Paris swept her off to Greenwich Village in New York City, where he owned a prosperous restaurant. The shock of all this and the terrible uprooting resulted in the death of Helen in less than two years.

The first urban civilisations, in which people who had formerly been nomads or agriculturists began to settle down in townships which presently grew into cities, occurred beside the great rivers of Mesopotamia and Egypt. They sprang, after a fashion, from the cultures which have so far been described, and many of their institutions, as well as their ideas, were related to those cultures. Accordingly "the history of their women is the history of primitive women modified by growing cultures and wider imperialisms. Here are the same problems, the same contradictory



solutions, and the same attitudes to women."<sup>1</sup> The exaltation of women in both these great regions was inevitably bound up with the religious attitude towards love-goddesses and mother-goddesses. In Babylonia, Ishtar wept every year for the death of her lover Tammuz, and followed him to the house of darkness, so that the world became chilled and the fields stood empty during her absence. But Tammuz experienced resurrection in the spring, and gave promise of new life both for the crops and for mankind after death. Against such a religious background it is only to be expected that women should have been in a position relatively privileged as compared with the status which they often held in simpler as well as in more elaborate societies. Most remarkable evidence for all this is the famous Code of Hammurabi, who ruled in Babylon about 1700 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Certainly there is no later code either in the ancient or in the mediæval world which was so considerate of the female citizen, or which provided for her so justly, and a brief outline of some of its enactments deserves to be recorded.

Foremost, the laws about marriage are of interest. It was in Babylonia theoretically a form of purchase, like all Semitic marriages in the ancient world. Legally a girl was regarded as the property of her father, and he sold her to the husband for an agreed price. But in Hammurabi's code marriage was also a contract to be man and wife together. It was presumed to be monogamous, but a childless wife might give her servant-girl to her husband, though she remained the mistress of her maid. But she could not sell the girl if the girl bore children to her husband. Supposing

<sup>1</sup> J. Langdon Davis, *A Short History of Women*, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Compare C.A.H., vol. of Plates i, p. 66. There is a convenient exposition of the code by Chilperic Edwards, *The World's Earliest Laws*, 1934. Hammurabi is dated later than he was twenty years ago.

that the childless wife refused to act in this customary manner, the husband was entitled to take a concubine, but not otherwise. Thus a childless wife had the right to choose the person who should bear children to her husband. If a concubine was taken, she became free and her children were legitimate.

As in numerous countries at the present day, the marriage was an arranged marriage and the bridegroom ceremoniously handed the bride-price to the girl's father, who in his turn handed it to the girl herself, so that it came back with her dowry to her husband. Such a dowry, which might include land or house-property, remained in the wife's possession and passed from her to her children. In general, one may say that the simple contractual nature of these Babylonian marriages was well in advance of most matrimonial practices in our own day. The nearest approach to something of the kind is the system advocated and outlined by Judge Lindsey in his celebrated book, *The Companionate Marriage*.<sup>1</sup>

In Babylonia, if a man wished to divorce his wife, he could do so provided he returned her dowry and the woman kept custody of the children, though their father paid for their upbringing. If she had been, in his view, a bad wife, the husband could degrade her to the position of slave, but she could bring an action against him seeking judicial separation on the grounds of cruelty. Should she fail to prove her case she underwent the ordeal by water, which was a method of handing over the decision to the gods as a final Court of Appeal. The persons, male or female, who submitted to this ordeal were laid gently on the surface of the river. If the accused floated, innocence was proved. But if the accused sank, evidence of guilt

<sup>1</sup> B. B. Lindsey and W. Evans, *The Companionate Marriage*, New York, 1928.

was presumed. Doubtless the inhabitants of Babylonia taught their children early how to float.

There are many other cases emphasising the equality of treatment handed out to both sexes, and it must not be forgotten that, in addition to all this, women could be judges, elders, witnesses to documents, and secretaries. Furthermore, there was the special group of women concerned with religion, to whom there is constant reference in the Code of Hammurabi. Assyriologists are not all agreed in their translation of the five classes of female Religious, but the usual practice has been well set out by a recent writer,<sup>1</sup> who gives the following names to the classes: Holy Sister, Priestess, Hierodule, Consecrated Woman, and Temple Maiden; and all of them were well provided for by the law. The first two classes were probably women in authority with something like abbatial office, and there seems little doubt that the Hierodules and Consecrated Women were such as had surrendered their chastity for the glory of the goddess.<sup>2</sup> It is thought that the fifth class may have represented young girls who were not yet initiate.

The arts were practised in Mesopotamia for many centuries, and it is relatively easy to obtain a picture of what both women and men looked like, although sculptures, reliefs, and seals do not give nearly as much information as can be obtained from the vast repertoire of sculpture and painting in the land of Egypt, which is next to be considered. The sculptures and small figures in Mesopotamia

<sup>1</sup> Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Another full account is given by R. Campbell Thompson in *C.A.H.* I, pp. 537 f.

<sup>2</sup> 19th-century attempts to explain away this usage are merely based on the assumption that Babylonians in the third millennium B.C. were wedded to a social code of proprieties akin to that of the Victorian English. This is improbable.





EGYPTIAN GIRL LUTE-PLAYER



a TWO SMALL DAUGHTERS OF QUEEN NEFERTITI



b MUMMY-CASE OF A GRAECO-  
EGYPTIAN PRIESTESS

are often produced with great artistic ability, although by our own prevalent standards the people as a whole were unattractive. At a very early period the main item of dress for either sex seems to have consisted of a long grass skirt falling well below the knees; but by the time of Gudea (c. 2500 B.C.) some women were wearing flounced dresses of long-fringed cloth which covered them completely from the neck downwards. Such garments—attractive if the



FIG. 6

various flounces are gaily coloured—may have been worn only by ladies of rank, or goddesses, who naturally wear a garb like that of important mortals. A pleasing example is the young goddess Nin-gul, who is thus shown on a bas-relief of black steatite (*fig. 6*).<sup>1</sup>

Presentations such as these are rare, and the prevalent type of female, represented in great quantities, consists of figurines made in terracotta and generally known as the Ishtar type. Was every one of these abundant terracottas meant to represent the goddess herself, or was it intended

<sup>1</sup> In the Louvre; L. Heuzey, *Catal. des Antiquités Chaldéennes*, p. 145.

as a gift to the goddess from a woman votary engaged in her worship? It is surprising to find that there is almost as much variety in these naked figures as there was in females of the Palaeolithic Age. Some of them, indeed, seem to approach the form of the Venus of Willendorf (*fig. 4*), while others are of thin, athletic, and almost modern type. The figures are frontal. They either hold or squeeze their breasts, or else they clasp their hands over the solar plexus beneath the breasts. A question of some importance is: why were these votive figures made? Here one is obliged to face the whole complex problem of human nudity and concealment, keeping in mind the dominant query, "Why did people—why do people—dress up to conceal their bodies, and occasionally of a sudden discard everything?" Those Bronze Age inhabitants of Mesopotamia whom we have been discussing were really much closer to men and women of to-day than they were to the palaeolithic folk of the last pre-glacial age; therefore we are more easily able, by putting ourselves in their place, to seek an explanation of this surprising abundance of naked terracotta female figurines found in their shrines; and a digression—not without its interest—is called for.

During the third decade of the present century Professor F. Pfister published an important encyclopaedic article entitled *Nacktheit*, or Nakedness,<sup>1</sup> in which he began by discussing, from the anthropological point of view, the various reasons hitherto given as the supposed explanations for the adoption by human beings of clothing and ornamentation, the latter embracing such habits as body-painting, tattooing, and special styling and dressing of the hair, as well as the wearing of rings, chains, bracelets, and all other kinds of adornment.

<sup>1</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *R.E.*, xvi, 2 (1935), 1541-9.



Five suggestions used to be advanced in order to explain mankind's abandonment of its natural, unclothed healthy body for a covered and concealed carcass. They are as follows:

(i) The suggestion that man invented clothing as a protection against the elements, especially against cold.

(ii) The suggestion that it was invented for social reasons, in order to distinguish members of a tribe or class.

(iii) The suggestion that clothes were first worn for a moral reason—that is, from a sense of shame, as in the story about Adam and Eve told in *Genesis* iii, "They knew that they were naked and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons."

(iv) The suggestion that ornament and clothing were adopted from motives of self-gratification and to appeal to the opposite sex; in fact for an aesthetic-sexual reason.

(v) The suggestion that clothes were apotropaic, turning away the effects of magic, sorcery, the evil eye, and hostile spirits; and that at the same time your clothing could conserve your own power by containing it.

Now, the first and third ideas may be discarded at once. The insular group known as Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America, is afflicted by a bitterly cold and raw climate. Yet the majority of the inhabitants go naked or almost naked, and are impervious to cold. Not only hands and face, but the whole human body is admirably adjustable to varied climates, and clothing is not



needed as a defence against the elements. Once, however, the use of clothing was adopted, things changed and human beings frequently began to feel cold when naked. The third suggestion must be dropped for a similar reason. Those savages who have never worn anything to conceal their sex are as 'innocent' as pre-tempted Adam and Eve in the Semitic fairy-tale. But once men and women have taken to sexual concealment they grow a sense of shame at self-revelation; except in certain cases presently to be noted.

Suggestion number two may occasionally apply in a fairly advanced and organised society which is capable of snobbery; and suggestion number four, giving an aesthetic-sexual reason for dressing up, may apply to a society having sufficient leisure and wealth to own 'ward-robes' and to 'ring the changes' on their contents; but again, this means a somewhat advanced society.

One is now left with the fifth suggestion—that both ornamentation and the covering of some or all of the body originated in magic, the precursor of religion. Without any doubt the true explanation lies here. Bright colours, glitters, painted symbols, ear-rings, nose-rings, even teeth filed to a point, will scare away such evil influences as may be aimed at one by witch or sprite. And at the same time the shutting in of one's treasured body helps to keep unhurt its own *mana*, or Greek *dynamis*,<sup>1</sup> or Latin *virtus*.

However—and it is here that the full significance is sharply revealed—there are occasions when nakedness becomes essential as an act of worship within a religion which has passed well beyond the primitive and magical. The idea is there in the Moslem rite of removing the shoes and washing the feet before entering a holy place, but carried further it was more reverent still to discard all the

<sup>1</sup> See Mark v, 30; Luke viii, 46.

contamination of clothes and to enter the shrine in cleanliness and purity, fearing no harm from evil spirits because God is in his house. Accordingly, cult-nakedness can be both cathartic and prophylactic, both cleansing and protective. Yet it was not only within the shrine, but at times in processions of a religious kind that such a custom might exist. Thus it is evident from Attic painted vases of the 9th and 8th centuries B.C. that women mourners, and even the widow herself, walked naked in the funeral cortege of any Athenian citizen (*fig. 10*). Coming nearer home, we observe Pliny's remark<sup>1</sup> that in religious ceremonials in ancient Britain the women and girls went completely naked after having stained themselves all over with a brownish sun-tan lotion.

These considerations may justify the view that every little naked Mesopotamian terracotta does not necessarily represent Ishtar, but is rather a permanent substitute for the female votary who, having worshipped the goddess, leaves the terracotta behind in the shrine. The figurine would thus represent the women in the act and attitude of worship, all clothes discarded, and the hands pressing or supporting the breasts.

Periodically fertility rites were practised by the women of Mesopotamia and all Hither-Asia and the borderlands of the Midland Sea. Writers equipped with quite another set of morals have too often assumed that women were in some sense 'stained' by such orgiastic rites, but we now perceive these things more clearly, and must concede that the women—like the later *Thyiads* of Athens and Delphi<sup>2</sup>—thoroughly and passionately enjoyed their fertility rites, and felt sanctified by them. Indeed, it is evident that such

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xxii, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, pp. 173 f.

were the distinctions and privileges of the women in Babylon, that we cannot fail to be astonished at the contrast of their lot with the grim lot which was to befall human females three millennia later.

Subsequent evidence exists to show that Hammurabi's legal code had a lasting effect for many centuries in Mesopotamia, but there is other evidence pointing to bitter disapproval on the part of other races of the customs stabilised by the code. Two things gave rise to denunciation: firstly, the orgiastic form which religion assumed in some of the cults of Ishtar and Astoreth; secondly, the simple habit of sacred prostitution, which could not fail to raise comment in other lands. The interest that Herodotus showed<sup>1</sup> was grounded in the usual unbiased Hellenic approach to any novelty, but the custom was resented and loathed by pious Jews of the 6th century B.C., as for example by a Prophet whose two lugubrious and repulsive chapters<sup>2</sup> reflect a seething turmoil of sex obsession in his mind. While the intention of the chapters was political, since the writer counselled submission to Babylon, the imagery employed sprang from an unsavoury attitude of mind such as would have failed to appeal to a Babylonian, Egyptian, or Greek. The ancient Jews, as a whole, retained considerable respect for, mixed with a great deal of fear of, women.<sup>3</sup> Even in their clumsy myth about the Fall of Man, which later wrought such havoc among literal-minded churchmen, it was Eve who emerged well from the story. She desired wisdom and was essentially kind, prepared to oblige the talking serpent, while giving Adam an unexpected treat. Naturally the latter and the Creator come

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, i, 199.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ezekiel* xvi and xxiii. In the view of some scholars Ezekiel was in Babylon when he wrote these passages.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. *Leviticus* xii, 1-7; xv, 18-30.



out of the awkward situation rather badly, for Adam's attempt to pass his trespass on to the other two with the words "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat", was not calculated to raise him in the estimation of his mate. Eve remains the heroine. None the less, the myth may appear to take on a humorous touch of almost Aristophanic comedy when the Lord God himself turned tailor and made fur coats for Eve and Adam, now conscious of their nakedness, before evicting them from the Garden.<sup>1</sup>

Hebrew legend and history enshrined some women of heroic mould like Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, Judith, Deborah and Jael, as well as Esther the Queen. But it is Deborah and Jael who most impress the modern mind, for Deborah, a prophetess, became in her own right the ruler of Israel and commander in battle as far back, probably, as the 11th century B.C. The Song of Deborah is one of the earliest and one of the finest poems in history<sup>2</sup>:

PRAISE YE THE LORD FOR THE AVENGING OF ISRAEL, WHEN  
THE PEOPLE WILLINGLY OFFERED THEMSELVES

Hear, O ye kings: give ear, O ye princes;  
I, even I, will sing unto the Lord;  
I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.

Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir,  
When thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,  
The earth trembled, and the heavens dropped,  
The clouds also dropped water.

The mountains melted from before the Lord,  
Even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> *Genesis* iii, 22.

<sup>2</sup> The verses quoted are from *Judges* v.

In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath,  
In the days of Jael,  
The highways were unoccupied,  
And the travellers walked through byways.

The inhabitants of the villages ceased,  
They ceased in Israel,  
Until that I Deborah arose,  
That I arose as a mother in Israel.

They chose new gods;  
Then was war in the gates:  
Was there a shield or spear seen  
Among forty thousand in Israel? . . .

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;  
Even Issachar, and also Barak:  
He was sent on foot into the valley.  
For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of  
heart. . . .

Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardd their lives  
Unto death in the high places of the field.

The kings came and fought,  
Then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of  
Megiddo;  
They took no gain of money.

They fought from heaven;  
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

The river of Kishon swept them away,  
That ancient river, the river Kishon.  
O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. . . .

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,  
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;  
Because they came not to the help of the Lord  
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite  
be;  
Blessed shall she be above women in the tent.

He asked water, and she gave him milk;  
She brought forth butter in a lordly dish.

She put her hand to the nail,  
And her right hand to the workmen's hammer;  
And with the hammer she smote Sisera,  
She smote off his head,  
When she had pierced and stricken through his temples.

At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down:  
At her feet he bowed, he fell;  
Where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

The mother of Sisera looked out at a window,  
And cried through the lattice,  
Why is his chariot so long in coming?  
Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? . . .

Have they not sped?  
Have they not divided the prey;  
To every man a damsel or two;  
To Sisera a prey of divers colours,  
A prey of divers colours of needlework,  
Of divers colours of needlework on both sides,  
Meet for the necks of them that take the spoil?

So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord:  
But let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth  
in his might.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Egypt and Crete*

The story of the earliest civilisation in Egypt does not differ greatly from that of the earliest civilisation in Mesopotamia. A Hellenist may stand aside to observe how, each after his kind, Assyriologist<sup>1</sup> and Egyptologist has competed for a kind of archaeological primogeniture. For us, the Hellenists, the question of who first became civilised is of little importance. What matters is that similar behaviour patterns emerged from a similar—though far from identical—root. From the earliest times the feminine half of humanity appears to have had the greatest importance on the banks of the Nile. Even Pharaoh himself had to acknowledge his queen as at least his equal, and generally as his superior; for to her belonged the land of Egypt itself, and the king was the man who married the daughter of his predecessor. With such female ownership on the highest levels, a characteristic and important Egyptian custom became inevitable. Not only in the families of the divine Pharaohs themselves, but also among the nobility, among the *bourgeoisie*, and even among the peasantry, it was usual for brother and sister to marry in order to keep the property in the family. So rooted was this system in the land that the Graeco-Macedonian dynasty of the Ptolemies followed suit, and at the very end of the line of that remarkable and notorious succession of rulers, even the brother of the great Cleopatra VII could become

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Assyriology' embraces Mesopotamian and various other studies.

Pharaoh only by marriage—brief, fortunately for her—to his sister.

It would appear that for many centuries wives as much as husbands might own fields and house-property to such an extent that in some circumstances the husband was little better than a lodger. In certain ancient Egyptian writings attributed to the Scribe Ani, the following passage occurs:

Be not rude to a woman in her house if you know her thoroughly. Do not say "where is that? bring it to me!", when she has put it in its right place and your eye has not seen it. When you are silent you know her qualities and it is a joy for your hand to be with her.

When, in some other case, the husband happens to be the owner of the house, the ancient writer still urges him to treat his wife with tact and discretion:

If you are successful and have furnished your house and love the wife of your heart, then fill her stomach and clothe her back. The soap of her body is oil. Make glad her heart during the time that you have.

As late as the days of the Ptolemies, marriage contracts frequently made over the man's property in entirety to the woman. Furthermore, under the code prevalent in Egypt, if a man had begotten a child outside marriage, he was obliged to take the responsibility for his action. In the writings of Ptah-Hotep there appears the following injunction:

If you make a woman ashamed and in an ambiguous position, be kind to her, send her not away, let her have food to eat. The wantonness of her heart can appreciate goodness.



Such an attitude to women on the part of a great and brilliant people must inevitably have promoted, even though gradually, the cult of goddesses at the expense of the cult of gods, and from this arose the enormous influence of Egyptian Isis. In origin she was the sister and the wife of Osiris, a fertility god in many of his aspects, and she was mother of Horus; but she gradually became greater than her spouse, as the eternal Queen of Heaven and the Earth Mother. Even before the Hellenistic age emerged in the Mediterranean orbit, she had attained great popularity in many Greek-speaking lands, taking on the attributes of some major and many minor deities of the civilised world. Her greatest praise is perhaps sung by Lucius Apuleius, a native of North Africa, but of ancient Greek stock, whose ancestors had lived on Mount Hymettos near Athens. Few novels in the whole history of mankind can have had as many readers as *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius,<sup>1</sup> with its extraordinary adventures culminating first in the hero's transformation into an ass, and secondly in his return to human shape. It is towards the end that Apuleius gives the most remarkable description of the appearance in glory of Isis before his eyes, and the words which she vouchsafed him:

All the perfumes of Arabia floated into my nostrils as the Goddess deigned to address me: "You see me here, Lucius, in answer to your prayer. I am Nature, the Universal Mother, Mistress of all the elements, primordial child of Time, Sovereign of all things spiritual, Queen of the dead, Queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world

<sup>1</sup> The best translation by far is by Robert Graves in the Penguin Classics, 1950.

below. Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me. The primeval Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, Mother of the Gods; the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropian Artemis; for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Aphrodite; for the archers of Crete I am Dictynna; for the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Persephone; and for the Eleusinians their ancient Mother of the Corn.

Some know me as Hera, some as Bellona of Battles; others as Hecate, others again as Rhamnusia, but both races of Aethiopians, whose lands the morning sun first shines upon, and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning and worship me with ceremonies proper to my godhead, call me by my true name—Queen Isis.

Historians<sup>1</sup> who have been attracted by those centuries which saw the slow penetration and indoctrination of the Pagan world by missionary faiths within the Roman Empire, have often held the view that there were only two serious rivals to Christendom which might have dethroned Paganism and won through to those vast privileges which the Church wrested from the ancient world. The rivals were Mithraism and the Isis cult. There can be little doubt that the former would have proved, from the point of view of the Roman administration, a misfortune even greater than that which befell. As for the latter, it might have been the best of the three alternatives, since it would have elevated womanhood, instead of ignoring it as in the military, homosexual world of the Mithraists, or despising it for its terrible temptations as in the virginal, penitential world of the monastic Religious. Nevertheless it was inevitable that the Church, with its stress on male

<sup>1</sup> See especially *C.A.H.* XII, Chapter xii.

divinity, should gradually compensate its one-sided faith by incorporating an Isis-like feminine principle into religion. In the Orthodox Church the All Holy Mother of God is in effect more beloved of men and women than is Her Son; and but recently those millions of Christians who owe obedience to Rome have been commanded to believe in the historical Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is said to reign with Her Son as Queen of Heaven. A grave psychological error made by the Protestant reformers was their rejection of the female principle of godhead. Thinkers can conceive of deity as pure spirit without any semblance of human shape, but the semantics of language which describe deity as 'He' or 'She' implant quite other ideas in most of humankind.

Perhaps the amazing influence of the Isis cult is due to the fact that it originated in a land where from an early date great women were great personalities and distinguished women played their part in history. Though the Code of Hammurabi was, as we have already indicated, remarkable for the fairness of its treatment of the feminine half of humanity, such literature and art as remain to us from the Babylonian region tell us little about individual women. By contrast, in Egypt we know the names of great queens: Hatshepsut, Tiy, Nefertiti, and her daughters, Arsinoe, Berenike, and Cleopatra, who all had an influence on the history of the world such as few women have achieved.

Egyptian literary texts abound, and representations of people in painting and sculpture are even more plentiful. Therefore we know both what the women looked like and what they wore. The history of Egypt before the arrival of Alexander the Great, which led to the Hellenisation of much of the country, falls into two main epochs, each of which had numerous sub-divisions. For our purposes,



however, it must suffice to say that the first period lasted from pre-dynastic times—that is, from long before 3500 B.C.—to about 1800 B.C., when a host of foreign invaders, better armed and equipped than the Egyptians, overran and took possession of the country for 200 years. Subsequent to the arrival of these invaders, who are thought to have come through Asia Minor from some Indo-European or Aryan group, there seems to have occurred a change in the physical appearance of both sexes in Egypt, though this change is more marked in the women. In the early period known as the Old Kingdom, both sculpture and painting portray persons with square shoulders, high breasts, thick waists, and short thighs; they have, in fact, peasant-like figures. But after 1800 B.C. a very different type is seen in Egyptian art, and it becomes easy to define the ideals of physical beauty to which naked dancing-girls, thinly veiled noble ladies, and Queen Nefertiti herself conformed. The artists presented a 'new look': slender shapes, contours that were boyish and yet softly curving; graceful, long, elegant limbs, and firm, youthful breasts. An attractive figure is the fashion-plate young lady of the time of Amenhotep III, *c.* 1400 B.C., painted on the wall of a tomb in Egyptian Thebes (Plate I). Stylisation has not destroyed the effect of a living creature. A lotus-flower curves over her carefully braided hair, into which a large comb has been inserted. She has large, disc ear-rings, rows of coloured beads, and bracelets, and holds a long, three-stringed lute. Over her sun-tanned body she wears a gossamer-thin linen robe, the transparency of which shows the extraordinary skill of Egyptian weavers. This very youthful figure may be compared with the representation of Nefertiti pouring out wine for Akhenaton (*fig. 7*). Both King and Queen wear similar raiment, long and trans-

parent, without any under-garment. The Queen, being older than the girl on Plate I, is not quite as slender, but her proportions conform well enough to the fashionable look of the time.



FIG. 7

Children in Egypt, like the small girl standing between the King and Queen, went naked. A fresco fragment<sup>1</sup> shows two of the small daughters of Queen Nefertiti seated on cushions (Plate II*a*), honey-coloured little girls with close-cropped heads, wearing nothing but earrings, necklaces and bracelets.

A distinctive feature of Egyptian civilisation was the manufacture, use, and export of linen, a material which for centuries was the product of the Nile Valley alone. While woollens must have been worn at times, since mid-winter can be cold in Egypt, it seems clear that for female attire linen took the same place that nylon takes in our own day. The day-dress of a girl or woman of fashion was high-girt, held by long, narrow shoulder-straps, and began below the breasts, which were uncovered, though they

<sup>1</sup> Now in Oxford.





MINOAN PRIESTESS



MINOAN TORERA

were sometimes partly concealed by a stole, or transparent scarf; and the one-piece transparent robe of the girl lute-player is probably to be thought of rather as a party dress. Such costumes seem to have remained in fashion right through the Graeco-Egyptian era of the Ptolemies, and on into the Roman-Egyptian age (Plate II *b*). Only when a new order, which regarded cleanliness and nakedness with repulsion, prevailed did the pattern of fashion undergo a violent change.

At this point in our survey we move away from Asia and Africa, in order to return to Europe, where our story began. Now, however, it is no longer a savage region that appears before us, but a highly civilised, indeed a sophisticated, corner of Europe—Minoan Crete. This civilisation attained its summit about 1400 B.C., and behind its flowering there lay some fifteen centuries during which the dwellers in Crete and the neighbouring Aegean Islands changed gradually from a primitive way of life. Some of the most important remains, from as far back as 3000 B.C., are certain Island marble figurines of women (*fig. 8*) which

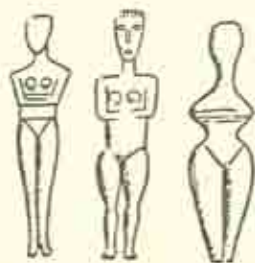


FIG. 8

recall some of the primitive carvings of palaeolithic date (*figs. 2, 3* above), and it is noteworthy that the two different types of feminine form are here represented. There is a

rounded, large-hipped type, sometimes stylised into a shape like a miniature cello, and there is the square-shouldered, slender figure with narrow, boyish hips. Since these figures—most of them small—have been found in tombs, it seems possible that they were made for funerary purposes, to suggest to the nether gods that the dead man had need of concubines and servants.

A number of these figurines have been found in Crete, and represent one of the ancestral types from which there ultimately developed the wonderful Minoan ivory figures, and the gay pottery pieces covered in *faience*. Careful study of one of these can afford a clear picture of the appearance of Minoan court ladies in the 15th century B.C. (Plate III). The whole costume is quite remarkable and deserves description in detail.

A full-length skirt touching the ground all round is worn. It consists of seven flounces, fastened apparently on a foundation, so that the hem of each flounce falls just over the head of the one before it. The colouring is purplish-brown on a cream ground. The lady wears over her skirt a polonaise, or double-apron, which has a reticulated pattern not unlike a tartan check, and is edged with a triple line of decoration. The waist, which is held in by a stiff belt, is very small. The jacket-bodice has elbow-length sleeves and is cut away in front from the shoulders to the waist, leaving the neck and breasts absolutely bare. This jacket is dark orange with purplish-brown panels. The skin is pure white, the breasts prominent but very youthful. Unexplained objects are held in the girl's hands—not snakes, as restored by the finder—but possibly twisted bits of woollen fillets. It is worth noting that in 1902, not long after this figure was found, Lady Evans wrote: "The lines adopted are those considered ideal by the modern corset-



maker."<sup>1</sup> The girl's hair is worn very long and loose. On her head is a hat which seems strangely modern, although it also reminds one of a Tudor bonnet stiffened and decorated with roundels of braid. Emphasis is almost entirely on sex-appeal, and one is aware that the artist, in making this enchanting little figure, was representing a typical fashionable young woman of his day who was out to captivate by means of such allure as she was fortunate to possess. The firm, well-formed breasts, the long, stray lock of hair caressing the armpit, the wasp-waist and wide hips, even the slight contraction below the topmost flounce of the full skirt—which serves to suggest with skill the actual shape of the hidden thighs—all these calculated details were meant to entice the male. There is in Minoan art no trace of inhibition or introspection. All is gaily extrovert within a rich civilisation already half-humanist because the emphasis is more on mankind than on god or the gods.

Whether or not a female figure in Minoan art is meant to be divine or mortal is often in doubt. A Cretan gold ring found at Mycenae shows a lady seated under a tree accompanied by two little girls, while two other women bring her flowers. They all wear flounced skirts, like the *saience* girl just described, but are unclothed above the waist (*fig. 9*). Sun, moon, clouds, and symbolic figures appear over them. The seated person, usually described as a goddess, may with equal probability be a queen in her garden.

One of the most interesting monuments to help our understanding of life in Minoan times is a famous stone sarcophagus discovered at Hagia Triada.<sup>2</sup> This depicts a complete and distinctive act of worship and presents the

<sup>1</sup> *Annual, British School at Athens*, IX (1902-3), p. 81, whence the description of the costume is derived.

<sup>2</sup> H. Bossert, *Art of Ancient Crete*, *figs. 248-54*.



celebrants not as priests, but as priestesses. The men who also occur in this painting are there as acolytes and musicians, but do not officiate. If there were priests occupied with the Minoan cult, we have so far no certain evidence for their existence; consequently the impression given is that women held positions of importance and distinction within that civilisation.



FIG. 9

We can, of course, only use the words 'impression given', for although there is a considerable bulk of material existing in Minoan script, it cannot as yet be wholly deciphered. Scholars are therefore thrown back on interpreting subjectively the available monuments, and fortunately these monuments, so strangely allied to European monuments several millennia later, lend themselves to a certain amount of interpretation. Inevitably much less can be known about the lives, customs, and thoughts of the ancient Minoans than we know about the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Egypt, who have left us so much in writing. But if ever ample documents from Crete should be discovered and read, a great and brilliant chapter would be added to the history of civilisation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Heroica*

Archaeology, like textual criticism, can be very painful to dreamers. The romantic makes for himself his picturesque or passionate dream in some setting like 'golden Mycenae', or the Forum Romanum, and peoples it with the stock figures of romance. Then the scholar, who has found what the ancient world really looked like, arrives to tell the emotional classicist that Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra did not appear in Graeco-Roman armour and Parisian drapes; to tell the Shakespearian that Caesar's murderers wore neither doublets nor trunk-hose. Archaeology, being an exact science as well as a scholarly discipline, can seem a great curse to many a wishful thinker.

Until quite recently it was not possible to perceive clearly the full difference between the civilisations of Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece.<sup>1</sup> Documents seemed to make it clear that the Minoans spoke a lost language of non-Indo-European origin, and those documents have as yet been only partially deciphered. Since material finds of paintings, carvings, and other works of art belonging to the Mycenaean show as close an affinity to Minoan culture as English 12th-century products show to contemporary French products, some scholars took the view that Mycenaean Greece was little better than a Minoan colonial dependency on the mainland. Any such belief is

<sup>1</sup> Often referred to as Helladic Greece.

now for ever untenable, since it is certain that the dwellers in and around the great Bronze Age castles of Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, and Thebes spoke Greek.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that tales of the Heroic Age told by Homer and others are not mere myths served up in pseudo-historical guise, but that they tell of events that once happened and of people—Greek people—who once lived. Consequently the Homeric poems have suddenly acquired a fresh reality, and it has become possible to compare the men and the women of whom Homer sang and the tragedians wrote with those of the early Iron Age in Greece. Furthermore, much that occurs in what one may call 'the corpus of Heroic legends' belongs to the same Greek background as do the writings of Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. It has sometimes been assumed that Homer, in constructing the great epics out of earlier materials, may have depended in part on pre-Greek—even on Minoan—legend and story; but now, because it seems probable that the whole corpus of Heroic legends on which he was able to draw when composing his masterpieces existed already in the Greek language, any Minoan contribution should be considered as slight.

Within the framework of all these stories we can now observe the social position occupied by women in the Heroic Age, and we may observe certain monuments of the 15th to 13th centuries B.C. which help to explain incidents in the epics while the poems existed in purely oral form; and certain other monuments of the 8th century B.C., belonging to the earliest period at which those same epics began to be written down. Both girls and women led a free, natural, and largely open-air life, and in this respect their habits contrasted markedly with various later historic

<sup>1</sup> M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, 'Evidence for Greek Dialect in the Mycenaean Archives', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 73 (1953), pp. 84 f.



periods. Evidence for this may be found in two early legends—that of the goddess Artemis the huntress, and that of the girl Atalanta, of whom more later. It is also worth observing that the Cretan conquerors of Mycenaean Athens may have known about athletic young females among the mainland Greeks; for according to legend, Minos, after he had defeated the Athenians, exacted an annual tribute of girls—as well as youths—who were apparently trained as *toreras*, to take part in the famous Minoan bull-fights. If one may judge by certain representations, especially the ivory figure ornamented with gold of such a girl (Plate IV) and a comparable painting on a fresco from Knossos, one might regard these figures as portraying a Hellenic rather than a Minoan type.<sup>1</sup> In the matter of fashions the links between Minoan Crete and mainland Greece were close, for sufficient evidence exists to show that the Court ladies who lived in the mainland palaces copied the dress of ladies who dwelt in the Cretan palaces<sup>2</sup> and wore long flounced skirts, tight belts, and bodices which left the breasts bare. Despite the formality of Mycenaean art, one gets the impression that these mainland women were far more massive types than their Cretan sisters, and this would account for a favourite Homeric expression, *bathykolpos*, or deep-bosomed, frequently applied to women of the Heroic Age. In contrast to this fashionable and courtly dress, it is likely that the women of the lower classes wore a simpler and more voluminous garb, if one may judge by a vase-painting of the 12th century B.C. showing a woman waving good-bye to a line of soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Such a difference in

<sup>1</sup> See Seltman, *A.G.A.*, Plates 7 and 8; Seltman, *Studia* (Diamond Jubilee Number), 1953, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> H. Bossert, *Art of Ancient Crete* (1937), p. 25, fig. 34; and see *ibid.*, p. 32, fig. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, fig. 134.

costume is natural enough and comparable to that of our own day, when no working housewife would care to disport herself in the latest Parisian model.

The great epics, which supply the earliest references to Greek women and their manner of life, prove that the wives and daughters of the ruling class were held in regard and affection, and that to some extent they had some of the privileges which belonged to the women of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Succession to the throne came by marriage with the queen, for Oedipus became king by wedding Iocasta, Aegistheus by espousing the murderess Clytaemnestra, and in Ithaca Telemachus, son of Odysseus, is no more than his mother's guardian, and the sovereignty of the island will go to the suitor whom she accepts—if ever she does. Hecuba, Queen of King Priam of Troy, is his devoted counsellor, and her son Hector's wife, Andromache, with her deep feminine emotion, is one of the great creations of literature. The passage in the sixth book of *The Iliad* which paints the meeting of Hector and Andromache on the city wall tells so much with such great economy. Here is that rare thing, the perfect love of a youthful pair described in simplicity and without sentimentality for the first time in all the literature of Europe.

Hector, back from the fighting, goes home to see his wife, and the maids tell him that she has gone to the walls like one distraught. He rushes off to the Scaean Gate, where she runs to meet him:

She came to meet her bronze-clad husband with a maid carrying a little boy in her arms, their baby son and Hector's darling, lovely as a star, whom Hector called Scamandrius, but the rest 'Astyanax', because his father was the one defence of Ilium. Hector looked at his son and smiled, but said nothing. Andromache, bursting into tears, went up to him and put her



hand in his. "Hector", she said, "you are possessed. This bravery of yours will be your end. You do not think of your little boy or of your unhappy wife, whom you will make a widow soon. Some day the Achaeans are bound to kill you in a massed attack. And when I lose you I might as well be dead. There will be no comfort left, when you have met your doom—nothing but grief. I have no father, no mother now . . . I had seven brothers too at home. In one day all of them went down to Hades' House. The great Achilles of the swift feet killed them all, among their shambling cattle and their white sheep. . . ."

"So you, Hector, are father and mother and brother to me as well as my beloved husband. Have pity on me now; stay here on the tower; and do not make your boy an orphan and your wife a widow. Rally the Trojans by the fig-tree there, where the wall is easiest to scale and the town most open to attack. Three times already, their best men have assaulted that point and tried to break in. . . ."

"All that, my dear," said the great Hector of the glittering helmet, "is surely my concern. But if I hid myself like a coward and refused to fight, I could never face the Trojans. Besides, it would go against the grain, for I have trained myself always, like a good soldier, to take my place in the front line and win glory for my father and myself. Deep in my heart I know the day is coming when holy Ilium will be destroyed, with Priam and the people of Priam of the good ashen spear. Yet I am not so much distressed by the thought of what the Trojans will suffer, or Hecuba herself, or King Priam, or all my gallant brothers whom the enemy will fling down in the dust, as by the thought of you, dragged off in tears by some Achaean man-at-arms to slavery. I see you there in Argos, toiling for some other woman at the loom, or carrying water from an alien well, a helpless drudge with no will of your own. 'There goes the wife of Hector', they will say when they see your tears. 'He was champion of the horse-taming Trojans when Ilium was besieged.' And every time they say it, you will feel another pang at the loss of the one man who might have kept you free. Ah, may

the earth lie deep on my dead body before I hear the screams you utter as they drag you off!"

As he finished glorious Hector held out his arms to take his boy. But the child shrank back with a cry to the bosom of his girdled nurse, alarmed by his father's appearance. He was frightened by the bronze of the helmet and the horsehair plume that he saw nodding grimly down at him. His father took his helmet off and put the dazzling thing on the ground. Then he kissed his son, dandled him in his arms, and prayed to Zeus and the other gods: "Zeus, and you other gods, grant that this boy of mine may be, like me, pre-eminent in Troy; as strong and brave as I; a mighty king of Ilium. May the people say, when he comes back from battle, 'Here is a better man than his father.' Let him bring home the bloodstained armour of the enemy he has killed, and make his mother happy."

Hector handed the boy to his wife, who took him to her fragrant breast. She was smiling through her tears, and when her husband saw this he was moved. He stroked her with his hand and said: "My dear, I beg you not to be too much distressed. No one is going to send me down to Hades before my proper time. But Fate is a thing that no man born of woman, coward or hero, can escape."<sup>1</sup>

The haunting fear is enslavement as the consequence of defeat in war. This in our century has been more than once a very present sense of trouble, although to the Victorians enslavement seemed something remote, as well as one of the graver faults in that Greek civilisation which they admired with such intensity—though generally for the wrong reasons. To-day there is greater realism in our thoughts, because we have experienced a kind of enslavement ourselves, necessitated by the surrender of every freedom under the deadening pall of total war. There will,

<sup>1</sup> Transl. E. V. Rieu, *The Iliad* (Penguin Classics), Book VI, somewhat shortened.

however, be more to say about slavery in the ancient world in a later chapter. Meanwhile one may observe that the fate of captives varied much, one of the most unhappy being Cassandra, a king's daughter. But Tecmessa, the concubine of Ajax, was raised above servile condition when she found favour in his eyes. At the beginning of *The Iliad*, when the great quarrel boils up between Achilles and Agamemnon, it is at least clear that the girl-captives Chryseis and Briseis are held in honour in the Achaean camp. Indeed, Achilles and Briseis are in love, for when she is taken away by the heralds she is all unhappiness, and later Achilles speaks from the bitterness of his heart:

Does not every decent and right-minded man love and cherish his own woman, as I loved that girl, with all my heart, though she was a captive of my spear?<sup>1</sup>

Marriage in the Heroic Age was founded on a basis of mutual trust, freedom, and an almost complete lack of jealousy, for though monogamy was the universal custom, connections outside marriage were in no way held to be disgraceful for either party. Odysseus was the lover of Circe and Calypso, and Penelope never held it against him. Thetis—a goddess—was the lover of King Peleus, Aphrodite of Prince Anchises. Young girls and married women did in fact enjoy a freedom similar to that of the men. Helen, while at Sparta, was the wife of King Menelaus; when she departed for Troy with Paris she became his wife—not merely his mistress—and when he was killed in battle she promptly married his brother, Deiphobus. But when Troy fell and Helen—prime cause of the whole miserable war—returned to Sparta, she resumed at the point where she had left off, and was natur-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Iliad* (Penguin Classics), Book IX.



ally the Queen of Menelaus, King of Sparta, without any loss of dignity or reputation. In fact it all depended on where one was living, and legal matrimony was governed by geography. Marriage, thus unencumbered by superstition and ceremonial as well as untrammelled by jealousies, could apparently be a reasonably satisfactory social contract.

Girls before marriage also had a remarkable degree of freedom, such as that enjoyed by the Princess Nausicaa, daughter of the King of Phaeacia, who went through the streets of the city to the sea-shore accompanied by her girl attendants without any police escort. Her conversation, devised in the sixth book of *The Odyssey*, with shipwrecked Odysseus has always enchanted readers by its elegance and natural assurance. Other girls, as uninhibited as Nausicaa, found it easy to explain why before marriage they were unexpectedly with child. If a girl thinks she has been visited by some bird-like creature, or some 'messenger-god'—that is to say, by an *angelos* or angel—her child is clearly virgin-born. Naturally young women did not come home to report that they had surrendered to some handsome young shepherd on the mountain-side, but they preferred to tell of an encounter with an Olympian god; or they said that, as they bathed in a stream, the river-god himself had appeared in human—or at least near-human—form, so divine that they dared not refuse. The family was unperturbed, because no stigma could attach to the young unmarried mother in Homeric Greece. Father might harbour doubts about the miraculous epiphany reported by his daughter, while conceding that it was a good story and that he would derive some credit anon from having a demi-god grandson. Mother may well have reflected that she in her youth had once found the same tale useful.



One inevitable result of such easy-going views about sexual relationships was the complete absence of any stigma attaching to bastardy. Men were as keen to claim a divine progenitor as their mothers were to boast an immortal lover. In *The Iliad* there occurs an episode in which the whole battalion of Achilles' forces are being marshalled for battle, and the names and pedigrees of company commanders are set forth with somewhat surprising effect:

The first company was led by Menesthius of the flashing cuirass, a son of the divine River Spercheus and the beautiful Polydora, a daughter of Peleus. He was thus the love-child of a woman and a god, Spercheus of the Tireless Stream. But a man called Borus, son of Perieres, had come forward with a handsome dowry and married his mother; so he was known as the son of Borus.

The second was commanded by the warlike Eudorus. His mother too, Polymele daughter of Phylas, was an unmarried girl. She was a beautiful dancer, and the great god Hermes the Giant-killer had fallen in love with her when she caught his eye as she was playing her part in the choir of Artemis of the Golden Distaff, the goddess of the chase. The gracious Hermes took her straight up to her bedroom unobserved, lay in her arms, and made her the mother of a splendid child destined, as Eudorus, to be a great runner and man of war. When in due course the baby had been brought into the world by Eileithyia, the goddess of travail, and had opened his eyes to the sun, a powerful chieftain, Echeclus son of Actor, married the mother, for whom he paid an ample dowry, and took her home with him, while Eudorus was carefully looked after and brought up by his old grandfather, Phylas, who could have shown him no greater devotion had he been his own son.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Transl. E. V. Rieu, *The Iliad* (Penguin Classics), Book XV.

There were many men only too keen to marry a young girl whose love-child had been reputedly begotten by a god, and to pay for such a girl with an ample bride-price.

The little world of the Greek Heroic Age lacked very many of our pleasant physical amenities; but it also lacked some of our cramping social restrictions which to-day often cause unhappiness, jealousy, resentment, and hate. And the accepted code of sexual ethics, which to the Achaean Greeks seemed the most suitable, and therefore the most moral code, automatically excluded from the social order two practices common today: divorce and homosexuality. The former is never mentioned and the need for it was not felt. As for the latter, Roman writers liked to imagine that some such relationship existed between Achilles and Patroclus, and deliberately ignored the passage about these heroes and their young concubines:

Achilles himself slept in a corner of his well-built wooden hut, with a woman he had brought from Lesbos at his side, the daughter of Phorbas, Diomédé of the lovely cheeks. Patroclus slept in the corner opposite. He too had a companion, Iphis of the girdled robe, whom the noble Achilles had given him when he captured the high fortress of Scyros, the city of Enyeus.<sup>1</sup>

Until some evidence occurs to change our views, we may assume that people of the Heroic Age were not much interested in homosexual practices, and that their social framework had some resemblance to those of the ancient Celts, Germans, and Britons. There was no lack of aggressive power and barbarity—to the verge of cruelty and beyond—but this could co-exist with magnanimity, humour, and tenderness; very much as in our own world.

<sup>1</sup> Transl. E. V. Rieu, *The Iliad* (Penguin Classics), Book IX.

The women and girls of the Heroic Age had freedoms much like those of the northern barbarians, and perhaps rather better than the freedoms of women to-day. Therefore on balance it seems that for a Greek woman of the 12th and many later centuries B.C., reason and respect, rather than stupidity and superstition, moulded the shape of her society. The picture given us of that society is, of course, one presenting the large ruling and landowning class. As far as the peasants were concerned, they are people who change very little through the centuries and millennia; therefore one suspects that Greek peasants of the late Helladic Age differed only to a small extent from peasants in modern Greece. On the other hand, there were townships at Mycenae, Athens, and elsewhere, and we know as yet little or nothing of the life of the people who dwelt in the towns which grew up round the big castles of the Mycenaean and subsequent geometric ages. One can only put the question: "Were they a kind of proto-*bourgeoisie*?"

Tradition generally placed the Trojan War in the 12th century B.C. Greek history begins formally in the 8th century, with the conventional dating by the first Olympiad in 776 B.C., which provided for the Greeks an era as artificial and as convenient as the era in use to-day. Since the Homeric poems probably began to assume something like their present form during the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., it is best to take some notice of the art of that era—just as notice was taken at the beginning of this chapter of the art of the Mycenaean or Helladic era—in so far as it applied to Greek women of the period. As the surviving art is mainly funerary in character, it has not much to show, but what it does show is noteworthy. Huge pottery vases, from four to six feet high, were in the 6th and 7th centuries placed over the tombs of citizens in Athens and



other towns, and they were painted with zone upon zone of geometric decoration interrupted by strips of highly stylised figures showing the dead man on his hearse, his wealthier male friends following in chariots, and other men on foot. Generally there is also shown a row or more of women, and these—like the widow of the deceased—are depicted as naked (*fig. 10*). Stylised as all the figures are,



FIG. 10

those which have clearly shown breasts are intended to be female, and one can only suppose that at a given period women of the aristocratic and citizen classes practised in funeral ceremonial complete exposure of a ritual character.<sup>1</sup> Among some primitive peoples in fairly recent times there was a parallel act of symbolic and erotic nudity, implying that the women offered the vision of themselves for the last time to the embraces of the man now dead. Some authorities have explained these figures as no more than stylistic abstractions. But the practice of funerary nakedness is exemplified by a brilliantly carved little ivory figure found in a geometric tomb in Attica and of a date not far removed from that of the famous big vases. It is the figure of a girl, formal and rigid, wearing nothing but a

<sup>1</sup> See p. 30.





ATHENIAN GIRL WEARING PEPLOS WITH OVERFOLD



a. b GIRLS WEARING PEPLOS  
IN SPARTAN FASHION (*above*)  
IN ATHENIAN FASHION (*right*)



drum-shaped head-dress.<sup>1</sup> She is surely meant to represent a concubine for the deceased, rather than a protecting goddess, who would have been clothed.

Very many centuries have been traversed in quick review in these four chapters—so many that, with our approach to Homer, we seemed to be getting close to our own day, and to be meeting men and women whom we knew because their thoughts and feelings were like ours. Close to our own days—yes; but only relatively. Hecuba and Helen, Penelope and Nausicaa, Chryseis and Briseis, they had the outlook, the emotions, the responses of those intelligent, integrated, thoughtful, gay, giddy, and unpredictable women whom we now and again have the good fortune to meet. They were the first girls and women to be already complete samples of Western female civilisation. But, whatever their fate, they had deep within themselves a certain assurance and calm and freedom which is now all too rare, for they had not yet been scorched by the fire of sex-hatred, nor burned by the acid of misogyny. Our wives, mothers, and daughters have had ancestresses who suffered the full-blasting hostility of certain pious, holy, God-fearing, and sex-hating men. Greek girls and women had no such bitterness as a background to their emotions, and thereby they had the advantage. These facts are important in view of what is to come, for the social setting of women and girls in the Heroic Age was destined to affect the shape of Greek civilisation in all its varied aspects, especially in Spartan, Ionian, and Athenian city-states. And the position of women within those communities was to have its effect, one way or another, on society right down to our own times.

<sup>1</sup> Seltman, *A.G.A.*, p. 43, Plate 14.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Sparta*

Two States in ancient Greece stand out far above any of the rest—Athens and Sparta. The way in which their cultures and economic lives contrasted sharply, one against the other, turned them into the two *foci* of Greek civilisation. Each stood for something in total opposition, and yet each acknowledged the one as the other most important part of the Hellenic world. Athens will be considered in later chapters, but it is now that we must concentrate on ancient Sparta, often known as Lacedaemon, capital city of the land of Laconia. Spartans sometimes wrote poetry, but never history. Therefore all the historical information which we have about them—and there is plenty of it—is derived from non-Spartan sources, and it is, with very few exceptions, strongly tinged with propaganda. Briefly, an Athenian conservative, indignant at the faults obvious in his own democratic constitution, would naturally contrast them with what appeared to him the vastly superior and well-disciplined state of affairs in Sparta. On the other hand, the democratic citizen, who was fairly satisfied with his own government, would seek to find things in the Spartan constitution and economy which showed what a 'dreadful lot' the Spartans were! Now, if that were all, it would be easy for the modern historian to recognise the two different types of propagandist writing; but, so great has been the interest of the world since ancient times in both those exemplary States, that Greek writers of the



Roman Age, Roman writers, men of the Renaissance, 18th-century rationalists, and 19th-century Victorians, adopted the stock ideas, and even embroidered on the ancient and somewhat exciting contrast between two remarkable peoples.

Everything was, and still tends to be, described in all the harsh contrast of black and white; and, while the natural philo-Laonian will say that Athenian women were mindless dolls, orientally secluded, and without knowledge of their husbands' affairs, the natural phil-Athenian will declare that Spartan women were over-sexed breeders of brutal soldiery. Both statements are immeasurably far from the truth. To-day in common parlance 'Spartan' is an adjective of commendation; not so 'Athenian'. We hear of 'Attic salt' for polished wit, and may call a certain elegance of speech 'atticism'; but a famous phrase written by the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, together with words attributed to Paul of Tarsus,<sup>1</sup> have given Athenians a quite unmerited name for flippant instability and religiosity. The most sinister thing about political and religious propaganda is that its noxious fermentation can go on working for centuries after it has served its immediate purpose. There is, indeed, only one method of checking the reliability of literary sources when they are suspect, and that way is the hard way of scientific archaeology. Our written corpus of fact and fiction about Spartan life begins with the impartiality of Herodotus; next comes Xenophon, followed by Plato—philo-Laonians both—and after them Aristotle, who was quite unfriendly. Much later there were Plutarch and Pausanias, keen anecdotalists, tappers of lost sources, and expounders of what was going on in Sparta in their own lifetime.

<sup>1</sup> *Acts xvii, 21, 22.*

Gradually there grew up a picture of Laconian life as something rather brutal, and at least one repulsive late Spartan ceremony came to be regarded as a practice of immemorial usage—the annual flagellation of boys at the altar of Orthia, once chief deity of the city and later to be identified with Artemis. Though this practice concerns the main subject of our chapter—Spartan women—only indirectly, because the tortured boys had mothers in Sparta, the matter must be faced in order to illustrate the distortion of their own history of which Lacedaemonians in Roman times were capable.

It was alleged that the boys, as part of their hardening and training, were beaten mercilessly, so that the altar ran with blood, that they never let so much as a groan escape their throats, that they frequently died under the ordeal, and that this ceremony was very ancient. Actually it was nothing of the kind. Herodotus made no reference to it; Xenophon wrote about punishment meted out to smaller boys by youths of the school prefect type, but not about ritual torture. Aristotle, who found fault with the excessive harshness of the Spartan education of boys, had not a word about these beatings, which—had they occurred in his day—he would naturally have used as further condemnation of Spartan methods. Before everything the Lacedaemonians were practical soldiers—whole-time Regulars in a state which *was* the Army. Wastage of man-power was always their greatest problem, and it would have been high lunacy to impair their recruiting potential by wrecking the nervous systems of cadets, as well as killing off a number by renal or hepatic haemorrhage caused by prolonged and brutal beatings. Finally, the mothers! Many Greeks in other states were greatly shocked not only by the complete sexual freedom of Spartan women, but also

by the immense power which they acquired when the Army was on foreign service, and retained subsequent to its return. Unsentimental though they were known to be about their sons, they would never have tolerated these gruesome scourgings.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Plutarch, Pausanias, and thousands of others in the first three centuries of our era actually witnessed these beatings at the Sanctuary of Orthia when Sparta was subject to Rome. Archaeological excavations made years ago by the British School have established the fact that the cruel ceremony was a piece of antiquarianism expressing the ideas of a sadist group of Graeco-Romans who liked to think they knew what the 'good old days' were like in primitive Sparta. At the end of the 1st century B.C.—probably in the reign of Augustus—special seats for important persons had already been placed in front of the Sanctuary, and with the aid of wooden structures the area round the altar was beginning to take theatral form. By the 3rd century of our era a stone amphitheatre with many tiers had been erected so that thousands could watch the spectacle. It was not only gladiators and Christians who were butchered to make a Roman holiday.

In a much earlier age, when Sparta was great, a kind of knockabout ceremony which involved some beating took place at the shrine of Orthia. Cheeses were placed on the altar of Orthia, and it was a point of honour among the youths to try to snatch them while certain other persons defended them with sticks or whips. It was for the boy with the "thickest skin and the quickest hands to win".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See H. J. Rose in *The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia*, 1929, pp. 404 f. Kathleen Chrimes, *Ancient Sparta*, 1949, p. 262, finds herself in somewhat reluctant agreement with Rose.



But this, of course, was nothing but a rough game; yet it was this which gave the antiquarians grounds on which to build false history.

At no time in the world's history can women have been so contented, so healthy, and so happy as they were in ancient Sparta. Subjection of women arises from a masculine will to continue the family and to keep intact property which is to stay within it. Should, however, a society come into being within which private property is forbidden to men, and within which the family as an idea is discarded, women achieve almost complete liberty and considerable power.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as the result of such a state of affairs, governed by a set of *mores* vastly different from those which now prevail, a variety of the evils which afflict society to-day simply failed to exist. As there were no family ties, there could be no cases of mother-fixation or father-fixation. Adultery and bastardy did not happen because by definition they could not. Prostitution, having no appeal, would have been redundant in Sparta, where there was no lack of sexual companionship within the group and no one had need of divorce. Homosexuality was so rare as to be remarked. How this excellent set of *mores* worked out must shortly be considered; but it must first be emphasised that all which has been written applied to the true Spartans—the great governing class in Laconia—and not to all the Lacedaemonians.

Dorian states, of which Sparta was the chief, generally divided their inhabitants into three classes, called in Laconia Spartiatai (or Spartans), Perioikoi (or Townees), Heilotes (Helots or Serfs).

The Helots were a subject population who had possessed Laconia and the adjoining land of Messenia before

<sup>1</sup> See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1953), pp. 112 f.



the Dorians arrived. Greek was their language, and most of them had been peasants beforehand, but those among them who were of the pre-Dorian ruling class merged with the Spartans. Their numbers are not known, but they outnumbered their Spartan masters. In general it appears that they were peasants who were tied to the soil and unable to leave the farms which they worked for their overlords, and these peasants retained their own family rights and customs. As far as their women-folk were concerned, it would be fair to assume that their life was not much different from that of other peasant women to whom reference has already been made.

Our knowledge about the 'middle' class—the *Perioikoi*—is also scanty. They were free, but had no say in the government of the country, although they, like the Helots, outnumbered the Spartans. Generally they resided in the small towns of Laconia and Messenia, and in the ports like Gythium and Pherae. They were small landowners, and served in the Lacedaemonian fleet and armies, for which reason it was possible for them, in exceptional circumstances, to obtain full Spartan citizenship. This privilege was one rarely sought, as it meant the abandonment of all private property, and these townspeople were the very ones that kept the economy of Laconia going. Trade and industry were all in their hands. They could handle foreign currency freely, for it was essential that someone should buy the necessary imports to equip the most efficient army in Europe with its offensive and defensive armour, as well as all the vast material that accumulates in quartermasters' stores. Here again there is nothing that we can say about their womenfolk, and we may do no more than assume that their life was like that of the women and girls in any flourishing *bourgeoisie* of the Greek Classical Age.

Fortunately much positive information is available about the girls and women of the great and prosperous Spartan ruling caste, which in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. was said by Aristotle to have comprised as many as 10,000 citizens, although in Aristotle's own day he opined that it had fallen as low as 1,000.

The simplest way to describe the life of Spartan women within the Lacedaemonian state will be to assume an imaginary person whom we will call Agido,<sup>1</sup> since that was a usual Spartan name, and we will place her in the 6th century B.C. All that follows is, of course, historic fact based on the available knowledge of the manners and customs of that period.

Government intervention occurred at the dawn of Agido's life, for when she was only a few days old she was carried off to be inspected by a body of old men who have been appropriately termed a Committee of Hygiene, and whose duty it was to decide on the fitness of the infant to live. Since they had much experience in this job, they were probably competent to assess whether any child, male or female, would make a good Spartan. If it appeared that the child was in any way deformed, weak, or feeble, their order was that it should be taken away and exposed on the slopes of Mount Taygetus. Admirable and humane as this practice was, it has received more condemnation since the eclipse of Paganism than ever the brutal scourging of the boys received. The boys, of course, were Pagans doomed anyhow to suffer punishment in eternity; but deformed infants are vehicles for souls capable of salvation, though destined by suffering to expiate Adam's sin. Few people think that the infant on the mountain-side was a conscious sufferer; few meditate on Spartan maternal distress,

<sup>1</sup> The initial letter is long.

especially in our age, when dozens of young mothers 'door-step' their progeny every week. But many people feel that the child should have been kept alive in order to suffer. The Spartans, however, simple though they often were, still had instincts of humanism.

Agido, having been passed as a fit infant, was treated like a baby of to-day—for swaddling clothes were barred in Lacedaemon—and she grew in a normal and natural way in company with her brothers under the age of seven, her sisters, and her countless cousins. Winter in Sparta can be very cold, summer oppressively hot, but the small children were hardened, for they usually ran naked, nor were they ever allowed more than a single, rough, sleeveless garment which was barely knee-length. When Agido's brothers reached the age of seven they went away, and never returned to the maternal hearth. Loads of psychological troubles were thus avoided, for the mother could never become too possessive of her son, nor he too fixed in adoration of the mother-ideal. For a girl it did not matter that she stayed at home, for since she rarely met Father, she could not well have a father-fixation. Life, however, became much more interesting for the child Agido, because every suitable type of sport was encouraged. Girls had, in their own way, the same youthful freedoms within the social framework as boys had. Plutarch is very precise about this, and he took a very special interest in Spartan institutions, on which he supplied a full commentary, not only in his *Life of Lycurgus*, but also in the short summary known as *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa*. In addition to this, he would animadvert to Spartan ways in that collection of his works commonly known as the *Moralia*. Not only the Spartan constitution, but the Spartan social code was attributed to Lycurgus, although it is improbable



that such a genius existed. Conceivably he was no more of an historical reality than Sherlock Holmes, in whom many people nowadays believe as firmly as 5th- and 4th-century Greeks believed in Lycurgus. What he represented was really 'custom'. Plutarch, however, is the one to whom we owe the following statements about Spartan girls. When they had ceased to be small children, but were still young, the girls exchanged the little sleeveless shift for the Doric *peplos*. But they wore this in a deliberately negligent manner, at which some Greeks pretended to be shocked. One poet, Ibycus, called them 'bare-thighed', and labelled them nymphomaniacs. Euripides, in his *Andromache*, written between 430 and 424 B.C., says:

Wish as you might, a Spartan girl never could be virtuous.  
They gad abroad with young men with naked thighs, and with  
clothes discarded, they race with 'em, wrestle with 'em. Intoler-  
able! . . .

The poet's snarls at Spartan ways went down well with the audience in an Athenian theatre, for the war with Sparta was on. Most girls and women who wore the Doric *peplos* used to sew it up from the waist downwards, but, as Plutarch remarks, the garments worn by the Spartan girls were not sewn (see Plate VIa), and would fly back and show the whole thigh as they walked. Sophocles, too, refers to this kind of garb in the following verses,<sup>1</sup> when writing of Hermione, daughter of Helen of Sparta:

And that young girl, whose tunic, still unsewn,  
Lays bare her gleaming thigh  
Between its folds, Hermione.

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles, fragment 788.



Custom, said Plutarch, ordained that the girls should exercise their bodies in races, wrestling, throwing the quoit, and casting the javelin, so that their offspring might have strong roots in strong bodies, and that the girls themselves might have vigour for labour and for childbirth. They were freed from all softness, mollycoddling, and effeminacy because the girls, no less than the youths, were accustomed to appear naked in processions and choral dances when the young men were looking on. Spartan sculptors made little figures of them in bronze, like two specimens now preserved in Berlin and Vienna (Plate VII, *b*). At such times they sometimes scoffed and jibed at youths who had behaved badly, and praised in song those who had deserved it. Thus they inspired plenty of ambition in the young men, because a man who was praised by the girls went away happy, but the sting in the jibes was sharp for the others. Plutarch insists that there was no wantonness in this nakedness of the girls, since it was but part of their strong desire for health and beauty of body, which they grew up to value.

Translators and commentators in relatively modern times appear to have been perturbed by this passage in Plutarch, and to have rendered the Greek word *gymnos*, naked, by 'scantily clad' or by a kindred phrase, because the word in some contexts can mean 'in your under-clothing'. This, of course, will not do for Spartans of either sex, who never wore more than one garment, and could therefore only be either naked or dressed; no intermediate stage of being *en déshabillé* existed.

The girls' choral dances and songs referred to by Plutarch were performed in honour of the goddess Orthia, and round the altar which stood in front of her small temple. One such song, written in Sparta by the poet

Alkman in the 7th century B.C., fortunately survives on a papyrus scroll of the 1st century A.D., discovered in 1855 in a Greek tomb near Sakkara in Egypt. Few documents contain more puzzles; few have so often tempted modern scholars to interpretation and translation. Imagination is called for, since no 'stage directions' are supplied in the document, although a Partheneion—or 'Girls' Song' as it was called—is the forerunner of the theatrical chorus. The translation given below is that by Sir John Sheppard, sometime Provost of King's College, and I hold it to be the best.<sup>1</sup> On a warm spring morning in May the Pleiads appear in the sky, only to fade out as dawn breaks. The girls have come to the temple bearing the gift of a new robe to dress the wooden statue of the goddess; for just as the famous Artemis statue in Ephesus had its rich wardrobe,<sup>2</sup> so in Sparta the poorer image of Orthia—here called 'our Lady'—had its modest outfit of robes. By contrast, the girls are unclothed,<sup>3</sup> as they themselves imply in those verses which proclaim their lack of all adornment. There are two groups of girls—all cousins, near or distant—the one led by Agido, the other by Hegesichore; and each is by her followers referred to as 'Her Leadership'. Agido's companions are named Astaphis, Demarete, Philylla, and Ianthemis, while the girls with Hegesichore are called Cleesithera, Arete, Thulakis, and Nanno. Their long golden manes and their lithe limbs make the poet compare them to young Enetian race-horses—a famous breed. Five a side, we know, but an eleventh person is present, named

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway*, Cambridge, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> See Seltman, *Twelve Olympians*, p. 134; *History Today*, January 1952, pp. 10 f.; *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1952, 'The Wardrobe of Artemis,' pp. 33 f.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Chrimes, *op. cit.*, pp. 266 f., thought the girls were turned out in some elaborate garb of Minoan type, an idea emphatically to be discarded!

Ainesimbrote; and she, almost certainly older, is the music and dance-mistress of all the others. She must be imagined as dressed in a white Doric *peplos* and as accompanying the poem on her lyre. With these explanations we may now present the choral ode:

THE PARTHENEION OF ALKMAN

ALL THE GIRLS

The Gods avenge! And happy he  
Who passes in tranquillity  
His day, without a tear . . .

AGIDO'S GROUP

I sing the radiant Agido.  
She bids the sun look out and show  
He has a rival here.

HEGESICHORE'S GROUP

Her Leadership's nobility  
Forbids me praise your Agido,  
Or criticise, my dear.  
Her Leadership appears to me  
So exquisite a racer she  
Among the common brutes might be,  
Of pride and prance and pedigree . . .

AGIDO'S GROUP

Fancies have wings, I fear! . . .

HEGESICHORE'S GROUP

The horse I mean—why, can't you see? . . .  
Enetian—Hegesichore,  
My cousin, with her hair  
That shines like perfect gold, and, Oh,  
The perfect face that shines below . . .

*Women in Antiquity*

## AGIDO'S GROUP

To speak plain truth I'll dare.  
 Her Leadership is all you say,  
 And yet she is not Agido,  
 But makes the perfect pair.  
 For see, on night's mysterious way,  
 Like Sirius, with jealous ray,  
 The Pleiads rise, our rivals they,  
 As for our Lady's festal day  
 Her sacred robe we bear.

## ALL THE GIRLS

No pomp and purple make us bold,  
 No twisted chains of cunning gold  
 To twine about our hair;  
 No, nor the coif that is the pride  
 Of Lydia, that lovely eyed  
 Delicate maidens wear.

## HEGESICHORE'S GROUP

Cleesithera, Arete  
 Or Thulakis may be denied,  
 Or Nanno, though so rare . . .

## AGIDO'S GROUP

Who goes to Ainesimbrote  
 For Astaphis ? Demarete ?  
 Philylla ? Ianthemis, though she  
 Is lovely ?

## HEGESICHORE'S GROUP

Hegesichore  
 Alone can make us dare.

Why, where is Hegesichore ?  
 Our dainty dancer, where is she ? . . .



## AGIDO'S GROUP

Aha! She's over there,  
 Close, very close to Agido,  
 Praising our gift; and now they go  
 To pray. God hear their prayer!  
 Only the leader brings increase,  
 And I, since like a chatter-crow  
 I talk, the name I'll bear. . . .

## HEGESICHORE'S GROUP

Only our Lady would I please,  
 Our Lady who has sent release,  
 And made our troubles all to cease,  
 When Hegesichore brought peace,  
 Sweet peace, for all to share. . . .

*(Agido and Hegesichore take the gift to the altar)*

## THE REST, TURNING TOWARDS AINESIMBROTE

The car must run behind the horse,  
 And mariners at sea, of course,  
 Obey the man that steers:  
 Our teacher sings, not better than  
 The Sirens, no, for no one can,  
 No mortals are their peers:  
 She's worth eleven maidens, when  
 You hear the singing of the ten,  
 A lovely swan with plumage white,  
 Singing where Xanthus stream runs bright. . . .

Plutarch expressed—rather solemnly, perhaps—his approval of the erotic effect produced in the young men by these dances, and added that confirmed bachelors—presumed, one supposes, to be by inclination homosexual—were debarred from attendance at such performances. They were, in fact, generally disapproved of in Laconia.

A Spartan girl married later than in many Greek states, for the reason that she attained puberty later. While the usual age at which a girl becomes technically nubile is between the years of twelve and fourteen, there are definite exceptions to this rule,<sup>1</sup> unconnected either with race or with climate, but governed by the kind of life she leads. Invalids as well as spoilt and pampered children develop as young as ten; athletic and sporting girls may reach maturity as late as seventeen or even eighteen. This explains why marriage in Sparta normally took place when the bride was not far short of twenty. Like most wedding rites, the ceremony was highly stylised and reflected the simple notions of an earlier age. Agido, of course, knew her bridegroom well, since he was one of the same 'set', and if the marriage was 'arranged' by parents on both sides, there was nothing rigid or possessive about it, for it was part of immemorial custom that within the 'set' partners could be exchanged after marriage.

Ceremonial in excess is either an opiate or an exacerbation, but ceremonial in moderation can give comfort to human beings—especially to womanly men and to emotional women. For these reasons it is in marriage-mimes and customs, no matter at what period in history, that ancient ceremonial is preserved, even though it be in attenuated or emasculated form. A girl must be 'done', not only 'the same way as Mother was', but also 'the same as Granny was'. Therefore, though grandmother was sprinkled with rice, granddaughter can accept with equanimity the symbolism of uninjurious confetti. A feast follows the rite, during which a rich confection must be pierced with a knife, or better, if the groom be a man of mettle, with a sword. Symbolism again, and it is what we

<sup>1</sup> See Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, *sub voce* 'Puberty'.



*a* YOUNG GIRL SERVING AS  
MIRROR SUPPORT

*b* YOUNG GIRL  
HOLDING A FLOWER



AMAZON FROM A GROUP ONCE AT EPHEBUS



do to-day. Therefore it must occasion no surprise that the Spartans also incorporated in their ceremonial of marriage habits outworn, though hallowed by feminine usage. An honest girl will always admit that she would love to be abducted by a gallant; and so, though relatives had planned the union, on a given day a fake abduction occurred, the girl—carried off by the groom—being placed in the new house of which she was now to become the absolute mistress. Henceforward she was not just 'woman' or 'wife', but *Despoina*, 'Lady'. Her man, however, put up the pretence that they were not married at all, but lovers; for he returned to his Messing Club, where he continued to live and fare frugally, slipping out after dark, dodging his mess-mates to go secretly to his wife and make love to her for a while before returning once more to the Club's austerity. With this custom, too, Plutarch was impressed; and, not un-sententiously, remarked on the resulting advantages of healthy and robust parenthood, as well as on the good for both partners of romantic delights and stolen sweets got in secrecy; and he thought it good that Spartan customs made girls marry only when they were fully developed and eager for experience, because an uninhibited union was productive of a kindly love, instead of the hate and fear which could be roused in a girl over-young for marriage.

None the less, husbands were somehow freed from any passion of jealous possessiveness of their wives, because it was held to be honourable for a free Spartan to share with any of his equals in the begetting of children. A middle-aged man with a young wife would introduce a younger man of good presence and breeding to his wife, and, if the wife approved and was pleased with him, the older man would happily accept as his own the offspring of such a temporary union. Similarly, a man might sleep with a

woman for whom he had conceived a special admiration, her husband consenting. Thus, by reason of this simple code of behaviour, those bugbears of the modern world—bastardy, adultery, divorce, and prostitution—were quite unknown. Furthermore, such was the social freedom enjoyed by the married women, who even as children inherited estate on an equal footing with their brothers, that they were frequently able to run two households with a separate husband for each. Strangely enough, only one case is reported by the historians of a man running two households, and therefore having two wives. Owing to the wastage of man-power, it came about that by the Hellenistic Age some two-thirds of the land in the Lacedaemonian state was owned by women. The power which this gave them was remarkable. Yet they never used it to attempt to change the hard life of their men.

There is an episode which one might call entertaining, in that it illustrates admirably the refusal of the Spartans to recognise bastardy. Some time after 750 B.C. the Spartans began a long and arduous war against their western neighbours, the people of Messenia. For close on twenty years the true Spartans were absent on the campaign, and the relatively modern custom of 'leave' in wartime had not been invented. Such a state of affairs soon became insupportable for the women of Sparta, who invited the *bourgeoisie*—that is, the *Perioikoi*<sup>1</sup>—to share their beds. When the victorious Spartan army ultimately returned, a serious problem confronted them. The boys and girls sprung from these irregular unions were called *Partheniai*, meaning 'virgin-born'<sup>2</sup> because their fathers were unidentified,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 71 above.

<sup>2</sup> On the meaning of *Parthenos*, etc., see Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, pp. 130 f.; and compare *C.A.H.*, iii, p. 537.

despite which fact the Spartan men had no word of reproach for their wives. Politically, however, these children fell only too obviously between two stools, for they could neither be classified as full Spartans nor as full *Perioikoi*. A statesmanlike solution resolved the complication, for in the year 705 B.C. all the boys and girls who had now grown up were sent off, under the leadership of a certain Phalanthos, to found a great colony in South Italy called Taras—or Tarentum, as the Romans named it.

There was a collection of terse sayings attributed to Spartan women; like that of the mother who told her son to come back from the war with his shield, or on it. Or there was the little eight-year-old Gorgo, mentioned in the fifth book of Herodotus, who was present when her father, King Cleomenes of Sparta, was being pressed by an Ionian emissary to start a war against Persia. The man began to offer bigger and better bribes, until the child said, "Father, the stranger is going to corrupt you if you don't get up and go". The King took her advice. Some, however, of these terse sayings were probably the work of anthology-makers.

Unlike some mediæval and modern aristocracies of Europe, the Spartans were by no means exclusive; but, like the English nobility, readily welcomed new blood. Tough *Perioikoi* could, as it were, be 'promoted from the ranks', win acceptance as full Spartans, and marry Spartan girls, while a similar welcome was extended to Greeks of other states, always provided that they were ready to conform to the hard and frugal Spartan way of life. Soldiering was what mattered, and it cannot be denied that, except for the Romans and the Prussians, the Lacedæmonians were the most military group in history. Yet they were not



expansionist, nor bent on colonies and empire. Their western neighbour, Messenia, was their 'Ireland' and a continuous trouble. Two great and brilliant Laconian colonies—Tarentum and Cyrene—were left to their own devices. For a few years early in the 4th century B.C. the Spartans tried to establish an Aegean naval empire on Athenian lines—and failed. They possessed both the virtues and the limitations common to professional soldiery. Chivalry constantly led them to win battles on behalf of other people into whose motives they rarely inquired. Help asked must be given. Forbidden to own coined money, they generally maintained their financial integrity, though exceptions were eagerly reported. But their interest in the latest weapons, sport, and hunting made them unimaginative; and indeed, it must have been easy for their gayer and more enterprising womenfolk to manage such simple souls as Spartan warriors.

A final reflection occurs to anyone interested in historical parallels. Perhaps the Lacedaemonian aristocracy was among the very best, combining as it did an aristocracy of birth with one of achievement. It is therefore fascinating to observe that the society which in its own estimation is the most proletarian in all history—the U.S.S.R.—adopted for a time a social and sexual code resembling that of aristocratic Sparta, and having similar ends in view. In 1924 the Comintern in plenary session declared the 'family' a danger to freedom. Thereafter respect was accorded to free unions, divorce was made very easy, occasional abortion was legalised, and children, being registered under the name not of the father only, but under the surnames of both parents, could not be bastards. For a good many years women were in a position far more favourable to them than at any other period since anti-





WOMEN SPINNING AND WEAVING



a ATALANTA AT THE BOAR-HUNT



b GIRL-JOCKEY ON HORSEBACK

quity.<sup>1</sup> But all was changed after the German invasion of Russia, for those in authority thought only of re-peopling the country and preparing cannon-fodder for the future. The clock was put back and made to tick in middle-class fashion. Family once more became desirable, abortion forbidden, divorce almost suppressed, adultery frowned upon, and the old mediæval-like Puritanism asserted itself in accord with the conventions of modern global *bourgeoisie*.

Much reading and reflection has led me to the view that, of all the complex and diverse feminine social groups that are known, it was the Spartan group which enjoyed the greatest happiness. They lacked two things which are valued by women to-day—a vote and a wardrobe. The former is no longer so much desired as it once was, and the women of modern Switzerland manage very well without it. As for the wardrobe, the one-piece, all-time, utility *peplos* was *de rigueur*—that, and no more; though perhaps grandmother might be allowed a big cloak over the *peplos* when winter was hard. Yet vanities never experienced cannot give rise to longings, and a Spartan girl might well get more sense of well-being from her tanned and healthy body than an Ionian girl got from all her Coan silks and Egyptian linens. In Tahiti and in Samoa until quite recently the feminine groups probably led full and happy lives. But it has yet to be shown that any women in history led quite such well-adjusted lives as the women of ancient Sparta.

<sup>1</sup> Details in Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, pp. 147 f. She is aware of the Spartan parallel.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Ionia*

Ionia as a geographical term is exceedingly vague, and therefore in complete contrast to Sparta, which was a city and still remains a township. The appropriate map in an ancient atlas shows a comparatively small district marked off roughly in the centre of the western coast of Asia Minor, having two large islands, Samos and Chios, associated with it. There were thirteen important cities in this province of Ionia, but they were never closely linked, save for the purposes of religious cult. The Greeks of Ionia were mainly, though not entirely, people who had emigrated from the Greek mainland soon after the Heroic Age, and Homer himself is said to have composed and sung his epics in Ionian cities. Therefore one must expect to find a relationship between the Heroic attitude to women and the attitude generally prevalent in Ionia.

Directly to the north lay another region known as Aeolis, with which the island of Lesbos was associated, while to the south was a region called Caria, sometimes claimed as Dorian, though actually of mixed race. Off the Carian coast lay Rhodes and the rest of the Dodecanese. Now, since all these peoples were Greek, or at least predominantly Greek, they seemed to the outside, non-Greek world to be a single unit, and among the Hebrews and other Semitic peoples, as one may observe from references in the Old Testament, they were consistently referred to as Javan (*Yāwān*). Anything to the west of Javan was



simply called 'the Isles'. The general Semitic—and for that matter Persian—name for all the Greeks was 'Javan and the Isles'. It is in this sense that we may now use the term 'Ionians' to denote the Greeks of Western Asia Minor as a single cultural group—and a very civilised one. Two non-Greek neighbouring nations had some influence on this Ionian group; they were the Carians to the south and the Lydians to the east.

Most of the Greeks, it will be remembered, had left the Greek mainland to travel eastwards and settle in Ionia after the end of the Heroic period, and they took with them a social structure and code of behaviour belonging to the Heroic Age.<sup>1</sup> Having established their new homes in Asia Minor, they naturally began to mingle with the native Anatolians, the most important of whom have just been mentioned. Mixed marriages proved to be the most fruitful means to the amalgamation of kindred cultures. While the Carians learned Greek, the Greeks, among other customs, adopted one by which wives and daughters always dined with their husbands and fathers, and everybody sat upright on chairs. On the other hand, the intercourse between Greeks and Lydians was somewhat more subtle, and it may be the case that the Lydians adopted the Greek custom of reclining at meals, although it appears that the womenfolk always joined them at table. Considering the very great political and economic importance of Lydia in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., it is surprising that we do not know more about the social code. But help to the understanding of this comes from elsewhere. Some time in the 7th century B.C. near neighbours of the Lydians called Tyrrhsenoi (*i.e.* Tyrrhenians), speaking a kindred language, migrated in great numbers to Central Italy,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV above.

north of the Tiber, and founded the exceedingly powerful and dangerous Etruscan state. An account of some of their customs—presently to be considered in greater detail—gives some indication of the extravagant luxury in which both Etruscans and Lydians lived. This had its effect on the Greeks of Ionia, who soon became famous for their comparatively soft and luxurious lives, and within the framework of this society and the Ionian-Lydia-Etruscan complex the women enjoyed a great deal of liberty and had, in consequence, much influence. Their lives were not planned, as they were in ancient Sparta, but many of them appear to have passed their time unencumbered by either prohibitions or inhibitions. As a result of this state of affairs, they often showed far more individuality than the women of the Greek mainland. Even the legendary Amazons, so closely associated with Ionia, seemed to have been endowed with definite, if mythical, personalities, and if one's thoughts turn to remarkable Anatolian women of the Classical Age, then one need but call to mind Artemisia, the first lady admiral in history,<sup>1</sup> Aspasia, the mistress of Pericles, and, above all, the incomparable Sappho.

Herodotus himself came from the mixed background which has been described. Born in Halicarnassus, a Dorian-Argive city with native Carian elements in the population, he nevertheless spoke and wrote in Ionian Greek, and all his sympathies lay with the Ionians of Asia and their great parent-city, Athens. As an Ionian by sympathy, he was a feminist, and his regard for women influenced his whole historical outlook, since he managed to combine this rather modern view with another which has persisted in reality as well as in retrospect ever since. For

<sup>1</sup> The second was Cleopatra, who, like Artemisia, lost her battle.

Herodotus the key to all history was the eternal conflict between East and West—in his own day between Persia and Greece—and, at the mythical beginnings of this conflict, Herodotus thought that he saw women as the primary cause.

A great historian, the late Dr. R. W. Macan, coined a memorable phrase when he wrote that a most important part of the historical philosophy of Herodotus was *cherchez la femme et n'oubliez pas le Dieu!* "From his racy introduction on the Rapes of Io, Medea, and Helen, through the stories of the accession of Gyges, the fate of Cyrus, the invasion of Egypt, the Scythian expedition, the exploration of the West, and so forth, there is always a woman to account for the trouble."<sup>1</sup> One can only observe that too many historians since the 5th century B.C. have disregarded the Herodotean maxim.<sup>2</sup> The impression we gather of the freedom enjoyed by women in Ionia and the neighbouring states is reinforced in the accounts given by Timaeus of Syracuse and Theopompus of Chios, both 4th-century writers, and quoted by Athenaeus<sup>3</sup> on the subject of Etruscan habits. The Tuscans were culturally linked both to the Lydians and to the Ionians, wearing Ionic garb and importing many luxuries from Asia Minor. The words of Athenaeus, indeed, give an impression of liberty slopping over into licence:

Among the Etruscans, who had become extravagantly luxurious, Timaeus in his first book relates that naked slave-girls wait on the men. And Theopompus in the forty-third

<sup>1</sup> C.A.H. V, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History* (1953), *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sages at Dinner*, 517 d. The reader interested in the topic of orgies will find yet further curious information in the passages immediately following the one I have translated. There is a good translation in the Loeb Classical Library's *Athenaeus*.



book of his *Histories* says that it is a custom among Etruscans to share their women in common; the women take very great care of their bodies and often exercise naked even with men, sometimes also with one another; for it is no disgrace for women to appear naked. And they dine, not with their own husbands, but with any men who happen to be present, and they pledge in their cups any whom they wish. They are also terribly bibulous, and are remarkably beautiful. The Etruscans rear all the children that are born, not knowing who is the father in any single case. These in turn pursue the same mode of life as those who have brought them up, having drinking parties often, and consorting with all the women. It is no disgrace for Etruscans to be seen doing anything in the open, or even having anything done to them; for this, too, is a custom of the country.

The grim thing for a moralist in all this is that apparently the Etruscans were none the worse for it. They remained formidable and were long feared alike by Roman, Latin, and Italiote Greek. Not only could the Etruscan lords and ladies surpass any of the reported orgies of the Italian Renaissance, but it would appear that one of Nero's parties was probably very much tamer than a Tuscan banquet. Meanwhile, the beauty of the women of Tuscany and the excellence of Tuscan wine can still be remarked to-day.

It has been necessary to bring into the discussion about Ionian women some account of the Etruscans because the relationship of the Tuscans to the Lydians and Ionians is, in a sense, comparable to the relationship of Americans having Dutch and Anglo-Saxon ancestors to the Hollanders and English of to-day. And the manners and customs of the one can throw light on the manners and customs of the other group. Yet, although our manners and customs are very different from those of the ancient



Greeks, we have no more right to criticise them adversely than they, if they could, would be right in censuring us.

Three purely Ionian city-states—Chios, Clazomenae, and Ephesus—provide evidence of the freedom enjoyed there by Greek girls and women. The athletic co-education for which Sparta was famous also existed in the large Ionian island of Chios, for the learned Athenaeus<sup>1</sup> wrote as follows:

The Spartan custom of displaying the young girls naked before strangers is highly praised; and in the island of Chios it is delightful just to walk to the gymnasia and running tracks to see the young men wrestling naked with the young girls, who are also naked.

There is one peculiar painting of the mid-6th century on fragments of an Ionian vase, probably made at Clazomenae and now in the British Museum, which must arrest our attention. It is the picture of a plump, naked girl riding astride on a plump, well-fed horse which is led by a bearded man, while a large puppy trots beside them. The picture, it must be admitted, runs counter to all preconceived ideas. Amazons in Greek art rode astride, but were always clad and armed, for they were barbarians, not Greeks. Greek women rode on animals, not side-saddle with a pommel, but sideways, as Greek peasant women do to this day. But this girl seated on a saddle-cloth rides astride like a boy, by balance and knee-grip (Plate X*b*). Since in Chios it is recorded that girls ran against and wrestled with boys, it seems possible that, less than forty miles away, at Clazomenae, with its kindred Ionian social background, girls may have raced on horseback and if

<sup>1</sup> Book xiii, 566 c.

this were a girl-jockey, the bearded man might be her trainer.

Freedom enjoyed by girls and women was, however, very conspicuous among the citizens of Ephesus, who had a single-minded devotion to the goddess Artemis. With an ease frequently characteristic of religious persons, they accepted two hopelessly conflicting concepts of the one and undivided godhead. In their thoughts she was a young and lovely huntress roaming the woods and mountains, delighting, like her brother Apollo, in music and the dance, free and unattached, 'chaste Dian', owing no obedience to any male. Yet the image in her huge temple presented a totally different concept; for it was a rigid, archaic figure heavily laden with tasteless metallic adornment that betokened great wealth. Tradition said that somewhere about 900 B.C. certain Ionians from Greece, escaping from invading Dorians, founded, under the leadership of an Athenian prince, the Greek city of Ephesus. Such was the first stage. There had been a Carian township and a temple before it was annexed; and many of the Ionians took Carian wives and, with them, certain customs that entailed much freedom for women.

The second stage involved a story about Amazons, who, as is well known, had a tremendous attraction for the Greeks, to whom the idea of a tribe of man-ruling, battle-fit huntresses was a matter of perpetual interest which provided a theme popular in Greek art for many centuries. Until recently critics have inclined to the view that all Amazon legends were mere expansions of travellers' tales about barbarous nomads living on the remote outer fringes of the ancient civilised world. But we, who not long since have heard much about the actual battalions of women



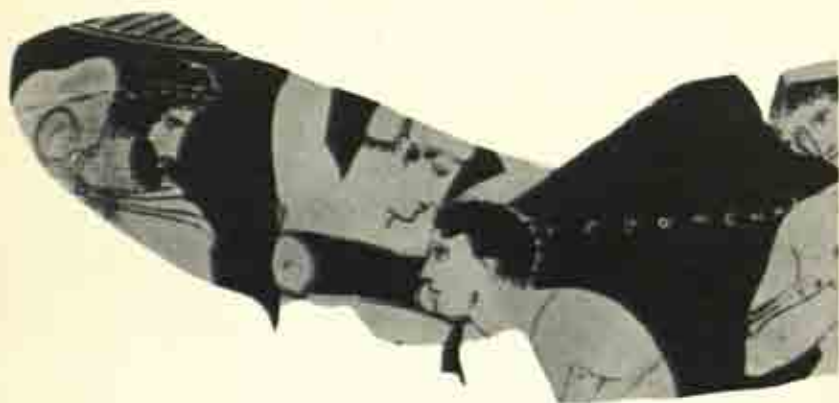
*a* ATALANTA



*b* PELEUS AND ATALANTA WRESTLING



*a* A SLAVE-GIRL.



*b* ATALANTA PREPARING FOR A MATCH.



soldiers on the Russian Front and in China, are bound to be less sceptical; and it is probable that among Phrygians and Carians such people did exist. It was alleged, in any case, that Amazons founded the first shrine at Ephesus, possibly before the Greeks arrived there, and had a very primitive image of a goddess, later identified with Artemis. Around this image the Amazons had performed a ritual dance, which was kept up in later centuries; for the poet Callimachus, who about 300 B.C. wrote a charming Hymn to Artemis, described the dance, and he ended with the warning: "Let not anyone shun the yearly dance". Earlier in the 5th century B.C. the Ephesians had invited four of the most famous bronze workers of the day—Polykleitos, Pheidias, Phradmon, and Kresilas—to make, for this famous sanctuary statues of Amazons (Plate VIII).<sup>1</sup> Of these several marble copies still survive, as well as a fine relief of a young Amazon excavated at Ephesus. The original bronzes showed them as youthful huntresses with short *chitons*, leaving one or both breasts bare and the limbs free, like the Ephesian girls of the ritual dance.

About 550 B.C. a new and delightful statue of the goddess was carved in hardwood by a celebrated sculptor of the day named Endoios. It resembled other standing figures of girls made in the 6th century—long-haired, upright, feet together, elbows to sides, forearms held out, the garment clinging, and having life-like eyes inlaid in enamel. But this quiet simplicity was not maintained for long. Metal decoration was added to the figure as kings and merchant-princes gave, and the temple staff accepted, an ever-increasing panoply of gold and silver clothing for

<sup>1</sup> The statue illustrated is in Berlin. Some marble copyists turned them into 'wounded' Amazons—a tasteless innovation, for they really were shown as tired after some kind of strenuous exercise.

the goddess, till she could never hope to wear her complete wardrobe at any one time. Mistresses of the Robes were appointed from among the wealthy and established Ephesian families, to dress and re-dress the image, the various ancient copies of which provide evidence that its metallic paraphernalia were frequently changed.

Daughters of the old families became in their 'teens priestesses of Artemis, and, when they married, resigned the post to join that most distinguished body of well-born Ephesian matrons, the Mistresses of the Robes. Girls danced the dance of the Amazons. The young met one another freely at the great annual procession, fell in love, and married. Parental consent was expected; but within their social order the lovers chose their own partners. The great annual procession for Artemis was a ceremonial event, comparable to the great panathenaic procession for Athene in Athens; and the former was probably almost as old as the latter, both having been started in the 6th century B.C. A Greek novelist named Xenophon of Ephesus, who flourished about A.D. 200, wrote a brilliant account of the procession. His story is set in earlier pre-Roman times when pirates were still a menace; but it is an extremely accurate record of local colour and Ephesian customs. The book was entitled *The Loves of Anthia and Habrocomes*, and there is much of interest in the outlines of the story so far as it concerns Ephesus.

CHAPTER I. Lycomedes and Themisto, distinguished citizens of Ephesus, had a son whom they had named Habrocomes, or 'Bushy-top' (a word normally used of a palm-tree), superb of physique, endowed with all the virtues, clever, musical, handsome. At the age of sixteen he was enrolled, as custom ordered, in the ranks of the *epheboi*, young horsemen (like those young

Athenians we see on the Parthenon frieze). But the young man had a fault; for he spurned the god of Love, declaring that never would he submit to Eros.

CHAPTER II. By contrast with this rather preposterous young paragon, the girl in the novel is enchanting. Now there came round the time for the festival of Artemis, with its splendid procession from the city to the Temple outside the walls, seven stades distant. All the local girls had to take part, splendidly adorned; and so had the newly recruited *epheboi*, who acted as escort to the treasures carried in the procession and to the girls. A mighty crowd used to attend, both citizens and visitors: for it was the custom that, at this celebration, the girls should find husbands and the young men wives. So the procession moved along, headed by the Holy Things—such as were in the care of the Mistresses of the Robes—then torches, sacred baskets, censers, then horsemen, hunting-dogs, and beaters carrying weapons of the chase. Every girl comported herself as though she were under the eyes of a future lover. Ahead of them walked Anthia—daughter of Megamedes and Euipe, citizens—and the beauty of Anthia moved all to wonder; though just fourteen years old, she far surpassed every other girl. Part of her tawny hair was tied on the crown of her head, but most of it was long and blowing in the breeze. She wore a purple *chiton*, knee-high, with a small fawn-skin over it, a quiverful of arrows, a hunting-knife, and carried a bow and spear, while her dogs followed at her heels. Often Ephesian folk who had seen her within the grove and sanctuary of Artemis, would begin to worship, taking her to be the very goddess. And in the procession some said that the goddess herself was present, others that the goddess had found a twin sister. They prayed and made supplication, exclaiming "Blessed are thy parents that raised thee". Among the *epheboi* Habrocomes was equally admired. Some in the crowd were already saying "What a couple those two would make!", or "Oh, for a wedding between Habrocomes and Anthia". These whispers are the tricks of Eros. Their eyes met, and they fell in love.



CHAPTER III. The great procession arrived at the Temple of Artemis, followed by the crowd. Habrocomes could not keep his eyes off Anthia, and she was almost sick with love. Nevertheless, she played up, as a girl will. As she moved in the ceremonial of worship, she purposely bared parts of her body so that Habrocomes might see; and by this he was indeed undone and made utterly captive to the powers of Eros.

CHAPTERS IV-IX. Parents concur; splendid nuptials; description of wedding-night.

CHAPTER X onwards. The rest need hardly detain us. In brief, the young couple started on a trip to Egypt, were captured by Phœnician pirates, taken to the Tyrian slave-market, sold, separated, endured many dire adventures by sea and land, only to be reunited at last and achieve a happy ending.

Historically the detailed story of the Ephesian procession, of the manners and customs of the people, and of the conception they had of their young goddess is of real importance. Clearly the root of Ionian feminine freedom lay in social conventions adopted centuries before, when Greek colonists had accepted something from the 'Amazonian' natives of the place. In the description which has just been given of the costume worn by Anthia it was stated that "she wore a purple *chiton*, knee-high"; and this seems the point at which something might be said about the costumes worn by Greek women. Reference has already been made to the Dorian garb generally known as the *peplos*, although no proper explanation of its appearance was given, since it seemed best to describe, contrast, and compare the two main types of clothing worn—the Doric *peplos* and the Ionic *chiton*. Although each garment was a large and simple rectangle of cloth, the manner of adjusting it to the figure gave in each case a different result, and while the Doric *peplos* had a remarkable resemblance to the plain,





a HETAIRA



b ATHENIAN YOUTHS AND HETAIRAI



a ATHENIAN GIRL LAYING PEPLOS ON CHAIR



b ATHENIAN GIRL UNDRESSING

fluted Doric column, the more elaborate Ionic *chiton* corresponded in an obvious manner with the more elaborate Ionic column and capital.

The Doric garment was much the simpler, consisting of a large oblong piece of woollen material exceeding in height the height of the wearer by about one foot. In breadth it was equal to twice the distance from elbow to

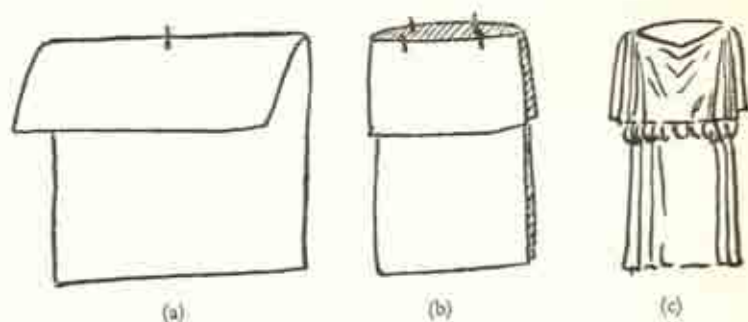


FIG. 11

elbow when the wearer's arms were stretched horizontally. The diagram explains better than any words can do the manner in which this piece of cloth was folded (*fig. 11a*) and then worn on the figure, the little strokes along the upper edge of the central drawing indicating the place where safety-pins or brooches were used to hold it on the shoulders. The Spartans, as already noted, left the whole right side, from armpit to heel, open (*fig. 11b*), though other wearers of this garment usually sewed it up from waist to heel. The over-fall, which is the special feature of this garment, conceals the fact that a cord or belt is worn round the waist, and that the garment itself is pulled up through this and allowed to droop over it, as shown in *fig. 11c*. For girls engaged in any active exercise the whole garment was very much shorter—only knee-length—and a

short garment of this type was naturally represented on statues of Huntress Artemis and of Amazons.

The Ionic *chiton* differed from the Doric *peplos* in many ways. The material was usually linen—often very fine—instead of wool, and it was linen of a crinkly type<sup>1</sup> that tended to cling closely to the body instead of falling in

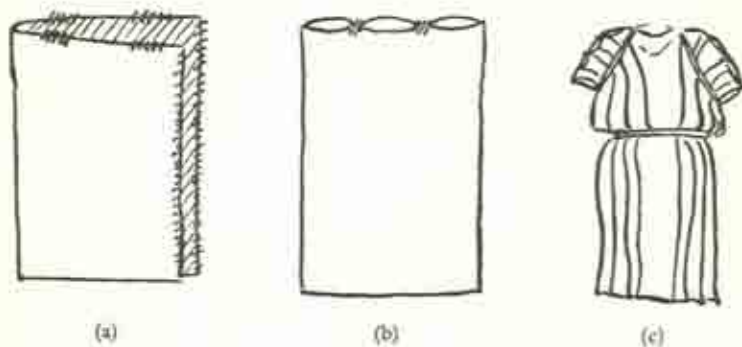


FIG. 12

statuesque folds. It varied in length and width, but always contained more material than the Doric *peplos*. The diagram (*fig. 12a*) shows how it was stitched up completely along one side and along the top in such a way as to leave three holes, for the head and either arm (*fig. 12b*). The right-hand drawing in the diagram (*fig. 12c*) shows its appearance when put on, and this garment also has a belt or cord around the waist through which the skirt can be pulled up. Since it was customary for charioteers to wear exactly this type of female garment, the famous bronze statue at Delphi perfectly represents the typical Ionic robe. But we must not forget that it looked more elegant on a slender and well-proportioned female figure. For girls and

<sup>1</sup> Some of the finer embroideries made by Greek peasants up to fairly recent times were stitched on exactly this type of linen.



huntresses this Ionic *chiton* could also be shortened to knee-length.

Over both Doric and Ionic garb there was often worn a *bimation*, usually a rectangular piece of material varying greatly in length, especially among women. Indeed, nowadays such a garment might be described as either a stole, a shawl, or a cloak, according to its shape and the manner in which it is worn. Spartans, as already noted, scorned the use of such extra covering.

Our brief description of the life of women among the Eastern Greeks of Asia Minor must close with some account of the most remarkable and famous of them all—the poetess Sappho. She was born about 612 B.C., daughter of Skamandronymos and Kleis, aristocrats of Lesbos. She married Kerkylas and had a child, Kleis, for whom she wrote an enchanting little poem:

I have a child; so fair  
As golden flowers is she,  
My Kleis, all my care.  
I'd not give her away  
For Lydia's wide sway  
Nor lands men long to see.<sup>1</sup>

She was the head of some kind of *thiasos* which worshipped Aphrodite and the Muses, and the members of which were young girls of good family from the Island and, perhaps, from the neighbouring mainland. One is reminded of Ainesimbrote<sup>2</sup> in Sparta, and, in modern terms, it might be said that Sappho kept a finishing school for young ladies. Clearly she had the greatest affection for them; most of her subjects are personal, since she wrote to

<sup>1</sup> Sir Maurice Bowra, *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation*, no. 153.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 71 above.

express her own feelings, and those of her friends. Nor did she hesitate to describe the pain it gave her when one of her favourites left to get married:

Him I hold as happy as God in Heaven,  
 Who can sit and gaze on your face before him,  
 Who can sit and hear from your lips that sweetest  
 Music they utter . . .

Hear your lovely laughter, that sets a-tremble  
 All my heart with flutterings wild as terror.  
 For, when I behold you an instant, straightway  
 All my words fail me.<sup>1</sup>

The love for her young pupils as expressed in the poems of Sappho of Lesbos led to the invention of the word 'lesbian' as early as the 5th century B.C. Modern genologists<sup>2</sup> maintain that homosexuality in the female is not at all the same as in the male. In the case of the latter the basic trouble is a subconscious refusal to grow up, and once past the "uncertain period of adolescence, the normal male no longer permits himself homosexual amusements; but the normal woman often returns to the amours—platonic or not—which have enchanted her youth. Disappointed in man, she may seek in woman a lover to replace the male who has betrayed her."<sup>3</sup> It is significant that neither Church nor Law has ever taken cognizance of lesbianism. In any case, few would be found to deny that of all women in history who have written verse, Sappho is by far the greatest poet. Because she had so gifted an eye and ear for natural things, as well as power and directness of speech,

<sup>1</sup> F. L. Lucas, *Greek Poetry for Everyman*, pp. 244 f.

<sup>2</sup> I refuse to employ the ill-constructed word 'sexologists'.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

her poems come through admirably in the best English translations. Three very short, but very famous ones may be cited:

Moon's set, and Pleiads;  
Midnight goes by;  
The hours pass onward;  
Lonely I lie.<sup>1</sup>

Rossetti made the finest translations of two little poems, the first of which describes a young bride for whom there are hopes of happiness, and the second another whose future seems dark.

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,  
A-top on the topmost twig—which the pluckers forgot some-  
how,—  
Forgot it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get it till now.

Like the wild hyacinth flower, which on the hills is found,  
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and  
wound,  
Until the purple blossom is trodden into the ground.

<sup>1</sup> F. L. Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Athens*

Before proceeding to consider the condition of girls and women in Attica and other parts of ancient Greece, there is another matter calling for appraisal—slavery; especially since there were in the Hellenic world plenty of female slaves, though probably far fewer than male slaves. Admirers of the ancient world admit the validity of one reproach levelled against it—the existence of slavery. As far as I am aware, this question, whether handled from the historical, economic, or moralistic angle, has always taken a form assuming that slavery is something which can exist *in vacuo*. In reality slavery is only the reverse of a medal, the obverse of which is mastery. While in the ancient world there were many slaves, there were many masters. But are there many masters to-day? This is no easy puzzle to solve unless we make an attempt to enter into the Greek point of view and to try to discover how the Athenian of the 5th century B.C. would have felt about our present Western world, our prejudices, our servitude, and our *mores*. As this has been done before and well by the Socratic method, we can hardly do better than to use it and try to imagine how, under the influence of some 'time machine', Socrates would have felt if he had been transported forward to the present time and then returned to his own century and city.



## PLATO'S ADAMAS

*(A Fragment)*<sup>1</sup>

The scene is Athens. Socrates is the narrator; and there are present two of his friends, Agathon and Lysis:

For two days I had slept after my extraordinary experiences, but on the third day I rose, bathed, put on my short chiton, and walked towards the Agora, where I discovered Lysis warming his back in the sun. He sprang to his feet exclaiming, "Socrates, then you are here! You have been gone for three months, but the rumour-mongers report that three days ago Poseidon sent a gigantic silver fish swimming through the clouds, and that a hole at its latter end having opened, you descended from it, an umbrella attached to your back, accompanied by the god Hermes. And that you came to ground in the grove of the Academy. Aristophanes, by the way, having heard this gossip, is already writing a play about you which he intends to call *The Clouds*."

"Truly," I said, "Athenians learn the gossip quickly. And while they report some truth, they also report certain falsehoods."

At that moment Agathon came round the corner and with urgency asked me, "Socrates, where have you been all this time?"

"In the western world," I replied, "examining the curious habits and beliefs of the Barbarians who dwell there, and it was by the help of both Hermes and Poseidon that I was able to conduct this enquiry."

"I perceive," said Agathon, sitting down beside me, "that you may be able to cheer us for many days with tales of your adventures and enquiries, yet if I may begin by asking questions

<sup>1</sup> After the manner of Douglas Woodruff, *Plato's American Republic*, London 1926.

in accord with your own manner of putting questions, I shall enquire as follows——"

Here Lysis interrupted to say that he too wished to ask an urgent question; but I said to him: "Since Agathon is the older, let him put his question first."

Agathon turned to me solemnly and said, "What appeared to you to be the most remarkable characteristic of the Western Barbarians?" I replied, "Hypocrisy." "And what," said Lysis, "was the second remarkable characteristic?" I turned to the young man and said, "Cruelty." For a while they were both silent and then almost together they said, "Pray explain."

"First of all," said I, "it must be made clear that many of the important and wise people among the Barbarians retain a great admiration for Greece as we know it, finding only one fault in our manner of life, a fault, however, which they look upon as very serious. They are reproaching us with the fact that we own slaves, and that slaves have become a part of domestic economy."

"They say," remarked Lysis, "that the pious general Nikias, who died at Syracuse, owned great numbers of slaves whom he maltreated in the mines."

"True indeed, but the Western Barbarians pretend that among them there are no slaves; whereby they display hypocrisy since they are themselves in a fashion completely enslaved."

"But how can that be?"

"Well," said I, "is it not necessary that a free man or woman should have the rights over his or her closest possession—the body?"

"Assuredly," said Agathon.

"And the complaint against slavery is that the master, or mistress, owns the body—though not the mind—of the slave. Moreover, our slaves can generally earn money and, saving it up, can buy their freedom; or they can be ransomed by their friends. But the Western Barbarians are all enslaved to institutions and powers politic from which they can never escape, even though

they are themselves hostile to these powers and institutions. This is the cause of their second remarkable characteristic which I have mentioned—cruelty.”

“Pray explain this in your own way,” Agathon remarked, “and do not be too long in reaching your conclusion.”

“Well, you know how among our neighbours in the island of Ceos there is a custom under which the whole island turns out to celebrate the birthday of a person having attained the age of seventy years. The aged one—he or she—is the guest at a great feast, and, all having eaten and drunk well, there comes a final toast which the hosts drink in wine, and the aged guest in hemlock. Now there are certain intelligent ones among the Western Barbarians who advocate that which they call ‘voluntary euthanasia’ for those in great pain who have no hope of life for long. Yet under no circumstances is such mercy permitted, not even with hemlock.”

“You mean,” asked Agathon, “that if some wretched man or woman is lingering in agony of cancer, those in authority compel him to keep alive and suffer through many days?”

“I do mean it.”

Lysis interrupted to quote the story told by Herodotus about the death of Polycrates of Samos, whom the Persians killed by crucifixion; and he added that evidently the Barbarians of the West were more given to torture than the Medes themselves.

Hereupon I continued to point out that cruelty of long duration was often meted out not only to the aged but to the very young. “In Greek States,” I said, “infants that are deformed, blind, or feeble of mind or body, are quietly exposed on the mountains, no one wishing to shed their blood. But among the Western Barbarians such infants are especially cherished, kept alive with great effort, and much money is spent in countries already overpopulated to force them to endure lives of misery and frustration. And I see that Lysis is going to tell us about the Phoenicians of Carthage who sometimes pass their young children into the fires of Moloch; and he will rightly say that the Phoenicians who kill their children quickly are less abomin-

able than Barbarians with their slow-extended cruelty over years of uselessness."

"And how," asked Agathon, "do they treat their women?"

"Still with cruelty after their fashion; for they incline to deplore sex relationships and to keep them very secret. If a young woman seeks to rid herself of an unwanted unborn child, she is a criminal; if a servant of Asklepios aids her he is a criminal. And in some lands of those Barbarians all divorce is forbidden; so that a woman finding herself wed to a man who hates and beats her, who is a murderer or a madman, can never obtain a divorce from such a man, nor may she wed again, nor take precautions against child-bearing with such a husband. But Lysis, I perceive is going to instruct us."

"Yes, Socrates," he said, "in Athens divorce is a simple matter when a couple are ill-matched, for the wife may demand her dowry back and go home to her father's house; or the husband may hand her her dowry and send her back to her father's house. Nor is a wife here her husband's servant, though she is, as in all lands, the slave of her own small children."

For some time we three meditated in silence on the strange cruelties in the customs of those Barbarians. "How?", "Why?"—Agathon and Lysis spoke together.

"Because they have a strange religion," I said, "differing much from ours and because the priests of their religion many hundred years ago made for the Western Barbarians strange canon laws that enslaved their bodies. Now, although few people still care for the rough bases of the laws, many legislators fear to incur the hostility of the priests by changing such laws derived from canon laws as are cruel to both men and women, to both young and old. Indeed, the priests maintain that they alone, under divine inspiration, have the right to change any moral law because they declare all other religions, including the Greek, to be false and theirs alone to be true; for they accept only what they want to accept, and call it inspiration."

"You astonish me, Socrates," said Agathon. "No Egyptian or Phoenician or Persian would assert such a thing; rather



would he offer to worship our gods with his. But some Barbarians appear to have bad manners."

"And what do they call their religion and their gods?" asked Lysis.

"Of their special names and rites, and of their inner mysteries, I prefer not to speak, for they would doubtless choose that I should not; even as Agathon here and I prefer that no one should speak to another who is not himself initiate about our mysteries at Eleusis in the holy shrine of the Mother. But the organising, the commanding, the law-controlling, and the punishing body—which includes many grades of priests, holy writings and myriads of laïcs—is named among them simply 'the Church'."

"Are all within this Church united to suffer and obey?" asked Agathon.

"By the Dog, No! The greater number, calling themselves the Catholic (or, all-embracing) Church, are all-excluding, and say that the Church explains the writings. But other factions are grouped as of the Protestant (or witnessing) Church, and maintain that the writings explain the Church. Now none would venture to say that these people are naturally cruel. On the contrary they commend the exercise of brotherly love among all peoples. Yet many with whom I conversed spoke ever and again about the Fall of Mankind and about Original Sin; and it was only after much questioning and searching in their books that I discovered the foundation of their ideas to be sunk in a foolish myth, such as some Arabian woman might tell of a night in the tent of a nomad."

"You, Socrates," said Agathon, "are very fond of myths, so pray tell us about this one."

"The myth, as the Church has used it," I continued, "comes from the Sacred writings of a people dwelling beside the Phœnicians and called Judæans, who allege that Zeus planted a fine garden containing many trees and birds and animals, and gave it to the first man created, naming him Adamas (or *the Hard*). Yet the man grieved to see the other creatures mating

while he had no mate, whereupon Zeus made a woman to keep him company. Now the god had set in the middle of the garden one tree the fruit of which he forbade Adamas to eat, setting great value on unquestioning obedience. The woman, however, being full of curiosity and suspecting the motives of Zeus, took counsel with Asklepios who, in the guise of a serpent, persuaded her that the fruit would do her good. She found it pleasing, and—since Adamas was in truth a soft man and she a creature of surpassing beauty—she persuaded him likewise to enjoy it. For this one act of male disobedience and female curiosity, these two were driven from the garden, like scapegoats laden with sin and wickedness, to suffer and to have children all born to unhappiness on account of one ancestral error. The Judaeans, indeed, hold these two to be the originators of the whole human race, although they do not say that children are all born in sin.

"You tell us, Socrates, a myth of the Judaeans, but what has this to do with the Church?" asked Agathon.

"Why, simply this: the Church, as it began to take form, was in no small degree under the guidance of a Judaeo-Greek from Tarsus who accepted this myth as being veritable history, who held all uninitiate people to be condemned to Tartarus<sup>1</sup> while redeemed persons would mount into the *aither*,<sup>2</sup> and who regarded the first female as the first sinner together with Adamas. This man of Tarsus, being somewhat hostile both to women and to mating, began to advocate both the repression of females and the intemperate practice of perpetual virginity. Since the Church placed his writings among the most sacred of their books, followers, especially among the priests, encouraged his opinions, themselves gradually forming chaste brotherhoods with strange names. Others among them wrote diatribes against the whole female sex, greatly degrading women in the eyes of men. For many of them have learnt not only to look down upon

<sup>1</sup> Where they would join the five celebrated Greek sinners, see Seltman, *Twelve Olympians*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 183 f.

women, but also to hate themselves as sinners and from self-hatred there is engendered cruelty to others. Or so it would seem to be. Is it not likely that from all this we may learn why the Western Barbarians, influenced by the Church, care little for human suffering, since all having sinned, their bodies are enslaved and they may yet suffer more in Tartarus?"

"Indeed, we may!" said both.

"And is it not also from this that we learn why they struggle to keep the aged and the feeble and the deformed and the pain-racked alive, hoping that before death they may be redeemed and attain to the *aithe*?"

"Yes, Socrates," they said. And, Lysis added, "It appears to be harmful, not only to each person, but also to whole nations to permit small myths to confuse the mind. Let us continue with your guidance to seek only the truth."

The foregoing dialogue is not a piece of special pleading, but a serious attempt to understand how the mind of a Greek living around 400 B.C. would respond to a sudden contact with the world of to-day. His interest would be concentrated upon us as human beings, upon our manner and method of thought, upon our leisure and our athletics, upon polity and legislature, upon schools and hospitals and religious feasts, upon what we believed, to what extent, and why. Socrates might have pigeon-holed for future reflection all the achievements of science and engineering, and the vast array of social amenities as 'their way of life'; not, however, of interest to him, though he would have let it serve him; for all he would seek would be those points of contact where comparison and contrast might aid human beings to understand one another. Plato, visiting Egypt, might cast a glance over his shoulder at the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx, but would ply his hosts with countless questions on law and custom, on social

codes and religion. Could Socrates come here he would do likewise, and his hosts would be scholars, teachers, philosophers, historians, divines, lawyers, elder statesmen, magistrates, policemen, priests, Salvationists, and publicans. And he would wear them all out. He would return to Athens reflecting on a world vastly more preoccupied with sex and sin than was his own Greek world. 'How has this come about?' would be for him of absorbing interest. And if Socrates had met any Marxists among the learned, he would quickly have perceived that the difference between the traditional materialism of the Petrine obedience and the dialectical materialism of the Marxist obedience was less than most people would suppose, since the dictates of either Church or Party might not, under pain of excommunication or expulsion, be challenged.

In our short fanciful dialogue we have tried to be fair and have shown Socrates misunderstanding certain matters. Now we have to turn the other way, and, taking up our theme of *Women in Antiquity*, we have to question our own views and those of our predecessors on the status of women in Ancient Athens. With few exceptions these views display a kernel of prejudice and a pulp of misunderstanding skinned over with the bloom of evasiveness. It is indeed odd to observe how inquirers into the social framework of Greek society have been misled. Few classical scholars<sup>1</sup> have attempted to give the lie to the extravagances spread abroad by means of educational works concerning the alleged attitude of Athenians to their womenfolk. Temptation to write up a violent contrast between

<sup>1</sup> Of importance against the conventional view is the work of A. W. Gomme, *Essays in History and Literature*, 1937; of outstanding importance, Professor A. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks*, pp. 219-36 (Pelican), 1951. I have added a little in my 'Atalanta', *Cornhill Magazine*, No. 983, 1950, pp. 296-305.



the daily lives of Spartan and Athenian women was great, and in the last century other half-conscious feelings helped the false presentation. Again and again it has been said or implied that Athenian married women lived in an almost Oriental seclusion and that they were looked on with indifference approaching sometimes to contempt. Literary passages have been torn from their context as evidence for this, and the inferior legal status of women has been stressed. There can be no more painful example in the realm of scholarship than that set by a learned man<sup>1</sup> bevilling the evidence by false emphasis, or by chopping sentences in half in order to make his point, or by twisting the meaning of words. Twice our sage proclaimed that in Sophocles' plays—*Electra* and *Antigone*—a girl was brusquely told by an angry male to get indoors! But of course! What parent or guardian nowadays seeing a young girl—a minor—creating in public a scene which was about to become highly embarrassing would not shout "Get into the house, you little vixen!"? Oriental seclusion, indeed! If that had been the custom, the girl would never have got out of doors to make a scene. Had our Victorian scholar never met an obstreperous young woman?

An admirable chance of using a truncated quotation presented itself in a passage from Aristophanes' famous comedy, *The Lysistrata*; at the very beginning a married woman says, "It is difficult for a woman to escape from home." Aha, that sounds like seclusion! Yet read the whole passage and you find the following: "It is difficult for a woman to get out, what with dancing attendance on one's husband, or getting the servant-girl up, or putting the child to bed, or bathing the brat, or feeding it. . . ." Turn from those words spoken in 411 B.C. to the year of

<sup>1</sup> Professor R. C. Jebb (*obit* 1905), cited by Kitto, *op. cit.*

grace 1954, and read a passage in a book written by a well-known anthropologist in America<sup>1</sup>—the land where women have more freedom than elsewhere :

Men must realize, more profoundly than they seem to have done so far, what it is to be a domestic slave; they must learn that a woman should not be exclusively required to be her husband's maid-servant, laundress, cook and concubine, nurse and governess to the children, spending the first quarter of a century of her married life so employed, and the next twenty-five years recovering from the effect of bringing up the children, still unrelieved of her other duties.

Aristophanes put the matter more tersely, but only a blind pedant could nowadays assert that 'Athenian married women lived in an almost Oriental seclusion and that they were looked on with indifference approaching sometimes to contempt'! If he does assert it, he will have to bracket the American with the Athenian housewife.

Xenophon, discussing household affairs, advises putting bolts and bars on the women's quarters, and our pedant sits up again, rubbing his hands. But when you look up the passage you find this is not for shutting wife and daughters into the *harem*, but it is "that the female servants may not have babies without our knowledge, and to prevent things being improperly taken from the women's quarters". A master liked his girl-slaves to have children, but he should guard them against both lustful tramps and lurking thieves.

Education of girls, it has often been asserted, was neglected. Certainly they did not go to schools such as boys attended, nor learn all Homer by heart. Since, however, many a girl in our own day has acquired an educa-

<sup>1</sup> Ashley Moutagu, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, 1954, p. 162.



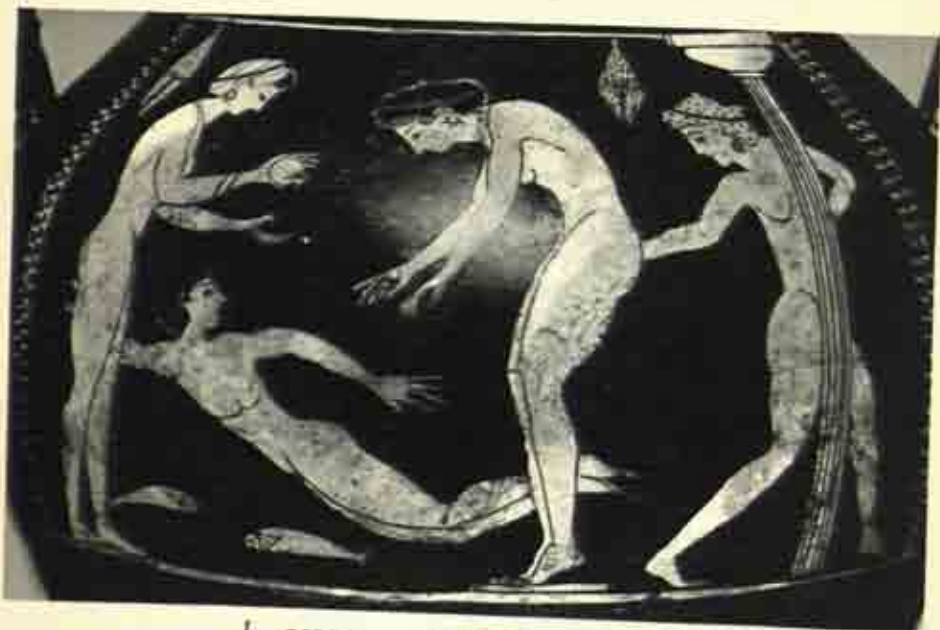
a A FLUTE-GIRL



b OLD THRACIAN SLAVE



a GIRLS USING A LARGE WASH-BASIN



b GIRLS IN A SWIMMING POOL



tion—including the subject of domestic economy—at home, the same thing could have happened among Athenians. In Homer we read how the little Achilles was entrusted to old Phoenix to be educated. His father told the old man to train him to be “a maker of speeches and a doer of deeds”. Such in her own way was Lysistrata, and many another housewife with her.

The theatre provides the most distressing of all subjects for reflection because in Athens women formed a part of the audience—not only to hear stirring tragedies, but also comedies that were in parts extremely bawdy. No one has stated the facts better than Professor Kitto,<sup>1</sup> who must be quoted at some length:

Plato, denouncing poetry in general and tragedy in particular, calls it a kind of rhetoric addressed to “boys, women, and men, slaves and free citizens, without distinction”. This would be unintelligible if none but male citizens were admitted to dramatic festivals. In *The Frogs* of Aristophanes Aeschylus is made to attack Euripides for his ‘immorality’; Euripides, he says, has put on the stage such abandoned sluts “that decent women have hanged themselves for shame”. Why should they if they were carefully kept at home? The ancient *Life of Aeschylus* tells the story that the Chorus of Furies in *The Eumenides* was so terrific that boys died of fright and women had miscarriages—a silly enough tale, but whoever told it first obviously thought that women did attend the theatre.

The evidence is decisive, but in the treatment of this matter scholars appear to have been unduly biased by a preconceived opinion as to what was right and proper. . . . ‘Athenian women were kept in a state of almost Oriental seclusion!’ And the old Attic comedy was pervaded by a coarseness which seems to make it utterly unfit for boys and women. For these

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 233 f. His whole section on Athenian women is first-rate.

reasons some writers have gone so far as to assert that they were never present at any dramatic performances whatsoever. Others, while not excluding them from tragedy, have declared that it was an impossibility that they should have been present at the performance of comedy. Impossible! That is the end of the matter. But Haigh<sup>1</sup>, though believing in Oriental seclusion, shows that the evidence disproves the notion that women could attend Tragedy but not Comedy. And even if we violate the evidence, we gain nothing, because the tragic tetralogy itself ended with the satyr-play, of which the one surviving example (Euripides' *Cyclops*) contains jokes which would make the Stock Exchange turn pale. In this matter, then, there was an equality and a freedom between the sexes inconceivable to us—though not perhaps to 18th-century Paris.

Romantic 19th-century pedants had their own private concepts of 5th-century Athens and its brilliant citizens. They imagined Attic society as made up of clever gentlemen who, though given to nightly symposian feasts (and occasional lapses with little flute-girls), maintained an august aloofness and never discussed anything unrefined with the 'little woman' at home. Professor This and Herr Doktor That always sheltered his 'little woman' and the girls from the rough facts of life. Therefore Athenian gentlemen *must* have done the same. What these cloistered scholars did not realise was that, while they mentally were no better than learned adolescents 'unspotted by the world', Athenian men and women were adult. Only adults could compose and hear the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and stomach the strong meat of Aristophanes. Only adults could create and understand the characters of Clytaemnestra and Electra, Antigone and Ismene, Deianira, Iocasta, Alcestis, Medea and Phaedra, Iphi-

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre*, 3rd ed. (by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge).

genia, Creousa, Hecuba, Andromache, and Helen, because there were living Athenian women of whom these characters were types.

As for familiarity with sex—every Athenian female, young or old, who had a home, saw standing beside the front-door itself the guardian Herm, an object of great sacredness, bringer of good luck and fertility to the family and its livestock. This was a stone pillar, square in section, topped with a bearded head of Hermes, two stumps springing from where the shoulders should be, and having an erect phallus carved on the front. Such a figure stood outside every public building and private house in Athens. One may imagine the mother, busy about the house, saying to an eight-year-old daughter, "Run along, Calypso dear, and look after the Herm. Scrape any droppings off his head, rub some of this oil on him, give him a little wreath of fresh anemones, and say a little prayer."

Finally it may be observed that our pedants have dwelt, sometimes rather wistfully, on the topic of *hetairai* in ancient Athens. *Hetaira* means 'companion', and carries the meaning either of 'girl-friend' or 'mistress' or both. The framework of social life in Athens was not far different from that of Paris up to 1939. There were brothels, mainly for foreigners of all sorts, licensed under the laws of Solon as far back as the early 6th century B.C. The licensing was done to prevent brawling in the streets. Later street-walkers living under the care of a 'Madame' began to appear. All this, of course, is the same as in any Mediterranean city to-day, a world-wide misfortune. But *hetairai* were certainly in a very different class; often highly educated women, foreigners from other Greek states and cities, earning a living sometimes in commerce, business girls, bachelor girls, models. The most famous were Aspasia,



the mistress of Pericles, and, in the next century, Phryne, the model who sat for the sculptor Praxiteles and the painter Apelles, posing as Aphrodite because she was said to have a figure of perfection—as mortals go. These women were betimes invited by men to parties at which wives did not appear. Paris and many a modern city will provide the social parallel. In modern Europe a new fashion in public dining only arrived in the last quarter of the 19th century, and before the days of the French Third Republic no 'respectable' woman dined in a public restaurant. English men entertained their men friends at their clubs, and apart from that, hospitality was given in the home. Encouraged by two *bôteliers* of genius, Georges Escoffier and César Ritz, the new-rich *bourgeoisie* in western Europe adopted the fashion still prevalent to-day.

It is, however, certain that the woman who held in Athens the deepest respect, regard, trust, and affection of a man was usually his wife, the mother of his children, the keeper and manager of his home. Ancient monuments, which have yet to be considered, supply excellent evidence for this fact. Nevertheless, some Athenian husbands had worries prefiguring male anxieties of to-day, and this is clear enough in Aristophanes' three plays about women. Two things which disturbed the peace of mind of the *bourgeois* man in Athens were the thought that his wife might be much too fond of wine, and the thought that she probably had an occasional lover. Oddly enough, worries of this kind do not seem to have troubled husbands either in Sparta or Ionia. But, then, those people had a different set of *mores*.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Aristophanes versus Plato*

When a civilisation or a culture produces an abundant literature which is able to survive the ravages of time and the blue pencils of bigots, then something of great value has been saved for mankind. But an abundant literature is not by itself enough to give an historian a fair picture of life as it was in another and distant civilisation. Contact with and knowledge of the material objects used in other ages are indispensable to any understanding of the people, their ways, their tastes, their thoughts—indispensable to any re-creation of the domestic and political humdrummery of their lives as well as the wild exhilarations of travel, maritime venture, orgy, and mystic mania. One must see the unequalled buildings of the Athenians, and their sculpture and their celature, one must handle the coins they bought and sold with, and—most important, perhaps—one must see their paintings on vases which show images of Athenian men and women, their children and their servants, going about their accustomed occupations. All these things taken together may provide a picture differing in very many respects from the image provided by the literature of the 5th and 4th centuries before our era; but it is the picture projected by the tangible actualities which is the absolutely true picture, while the other—the selected and selective picture supplied by literature—must be corrected when needful in the presence of actualities both concrete and contemporary.

Athens, indeed, favours the use equally of an abundant literature and of an abundance of monuments over a period of two centuries; but it is essential that *both* be used by any historian busy re-creating the civilisation of the Athenian State. In the preceding chapter we have made considerable use of the literary evidence relating to the status of girls and women. In this chapter we may begin by observing some samples of the archaeological evidence that illustrates the lives of women in various walks of life. Here, of course, we expect to gain some information from works of sculpture and relief, arts which had immense importance in the ancient world. Moreover, it is to be noted that Athens is the most efficiently excavated site, not only in Greece, but along all the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Its monuments are displayed and laid bare as scientifically as on any other known Greek site, but on a vaster scale,<sup>1</sup> while the products of its busy potteries are found in their thousands all over the ancient world, and provide a silent but illuminating commentary on the lives and habits of Athenian men and women. Athletic, domestic, religious, orgiastic, poetic, and mythical scenes decorate the many-shaped vases—black on red, red on black, or coloured on white—painted by brilliant artists and by ordinary draughtsmen upon pots which Attic potters made. Not only scenes representing home life, parties, weddings, sports, hunting, festivals, battle, sudden death, funerals, reverent gestures in the graveyard, but also scenes representing divine subjects, mythical episodes, and god-possessed orgies, are invariably rendered in human terms. If labels accompany divine or heroic personages, their pictures are of human beings—gods and goddesses created in man's image—and therefore, really, elegant

<sup>1</sup> See Ida Thallon Hill, *The Ancient City of Athens*, 1953.

Athenian mortals. In sculpture it is very much the same, though as far as women are concerned we do not need analogies from goddesses because there is a wealth of marble representations of mortal girls.

Well before 560 B.C. it became customary to set up and dedicate on the Athenian Acropolis marble figures of men, girls, and animals. But the surprising fact is that figures of girls far outnumbered the others. Most famous among them is that exquisite creature, the 'Peplos Kore'<sup>1</sup> of about 540 B.C. (Plate V). But there are numerous others dressed in Ionic garb who come very near to equalling her in charm. On the Acropolis itself the cult of goddesses does seem to be more important than that of gods. Athene is there under several titles: Athene Parthenos, Athene Promachos, Athene Polias, and Athene Nike. Artemis is worshipped in her sanctuary close to the gate, where little girls were initiated in a kind of 'confirmation ceremony', part of which entailed wearing yellow-brown robes and playing at being little she-bears. And there was the Pandroseion—precinct of the 'All-dewy One'—with her two sisters, nymphs in classical times, though formerly goddesses. Nor must we forget the holy cleft in the rock where Gaia—Mother Earth—rose up to receive the infant Erichthonios. Beside all these the cult of Zeus himself and of Poseidon, as well as those of Hephaistos and Erechtheus, evince a small divine masculine minority. The Parthenon itself and its famous sculptures cannot really fail to emphasise for us the strong streak of feminism in Athenian religion, and it is not to be forgotten that the Panathenaic Procession, starting from outside the western city-gate, was headed by a bevy of girls. This fact alone must raise a smile when one reflects on the alleged repression and neglect of the women

<sup>1</sup> Often known by her Museum number as '679'.



of Athens. True, the best-preserved section from the east end of the Parthenon frieze happens to be, not in London, but in Paris; but it is very well known, and shows a group of girls who always led the procession, some of them carrying the robes for the goddess,<sup>1</sup> some of them *kanephoroi*, or basket-bearers, with offerings for Athene.

Finally, as far as the honouring of Attic femininity is concerned, we must not forget the remarkable series of marble tombstones made and set up during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Until fairly recent years puerperal fever was a danger which carried off young mothers, especially with first pregnancies. One must assume that a similar danger beset young Greek women having the normal kind of *bourgeois* background,<sup>2</sup> and this view is supported by the fact that a considerable number of Greek tombstones, once set up on graves of young married women, were made to suggest this because 'the deceased' holds a new-born baby. The important fact is that such tombstones *were* put up in Athens with great frequency by bereaved husbands. The critic may look at some of these monuments and murmur, "Second-rate art"; the cynic may look and purse his lips to say, "Sentimental, surely?" Of course, both will be partly right, but not entirely. Nevertheless, no one dare honestly say that the widower despised his wife!

Affection given to a young slave-girl by some Athenian master or mistress is recorded on a little marble tombstone of about 415 B.C. (Plate XXI). Mynno is the name of the young girl for whom the monument was put up, and no male name, father or husband, appears; and, as her hair

<sup>1</sup> One remembers the similar robes given to statues at Sparta and at Ephesus; see pp. 76, 93 f. above.

<sup>2</sup> Peasant girls and women seem more immune to the fever.



is worn short, we know that she must have been a servant, for 5th-century slave-girls seem always to have been cropped. It is probable, as one authority has remarked, that no other people has honoured a servant/maid with a monument of such high nobility.

It is when one begins to observe the scenes painted on Athenian vases during the 6th, 5th, and 4th centuries B.C. that one perceives the constant Greek preoccupation with the feminine. One may see in their hundreds pictures of happy women, of wives and mothers seeing their men off to the wars, of bereaved women—one at a dead lover's tomb, another at a husband's sepulchre. There are vain little brides gazing into mirrors, bright, chattering brides/maids, wide/open doors admitting visitors, gay naked creatures bathing, washing their hair, tidying their rooms, young mothers playing with the child or served by the maid with a fresh dress and change of jewellery. When feminine figures are shown with clothing discarded it may be observed that they often have a rather boyish appearance, and that the pelvis seems small and the hips narrower than is usual except among young girls not yet fully developed. This is due to an artistic convention derived from the fact that Greek vase-painters were more accustomed to drawing athletes in the gymnasium than girls in the bath-house, and so in the sketches the girls came out with boyish hips and thighs.

Such is the embarrassment of riches in these pictures that it is not very easy to make a selection. However, a few pictures—slaves, girl-companions, and the gentry—taken from Athenian vase-paintings of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., are shown on our Plates.

Plate XV<sup>a</sup> shows a very youthful flute-girl, naked but for a necklace and a wreath of vine-leaves, playing on the

double-flutes. Her short hair shows that she is a slave.<sup>1</sup> Another short-haired slave-girl is shown on Plate XIIIa, but this one, dressed in a *peplos*, is an attendant on the mistress, rather than on the master of the house. She balances a basket on her head and carries a perfume-vase in her left hand.<sup>2</sup> A third picture (Plate XVb) is very much of a contrast, for it depicts an aged female slave, probably of Thracian origin, since she has tattoo-marks on her wrists and neck, whose bent figure is supported by a stick, while in her left hand she carries a lyre, for she is following her young master, who is going to have a music lesson. Behind her head her name, GEROPHSO, is written in letters of about 470 B.C., the time when the vase was painted.<sup>3</sup> Here is a remarkable picture of old age, and a piece of realism in art which is unusual for the 5th century B.C. Two paintings on vases made about 500 B.C., represent *betairai*, or companion-girls at feasts (Plate XIIIa, b). One holds a large wine-cup in her right hand as she turns round to speak to a friend (not shown in this picture). In the scene below there are young men and their girls—their names inscribed beside them—and it is to be noted that the *betairai*, being free women, wear their hair long.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most interesting early scenes, painted about 560 B.C., and representing the household activities of spinning and weaving, is depicted on Plate IX. The lady of the house is the only one seated on a chair—of a very modern type—and she is pulling wool out of a large wool-basket in order to prepare it for spinning. To her left is a group of three figures, two of them engaged in weighing balls of uncombed wool in a pair of scales. At the extreme

<sup>1</sup> On a cup of c. 480 B.C., now in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup> From a wedding-vase painted about 460 B.C., now in Toronto.

<sup>3</sup> The vase now in Schwerin.

<sup>4</sup> The vases are in Munich and Brussels.

right of this long picture there is a loom with threads held by weights which hang down near to the ground, and two smaller women—one of them a slave, as she has short hair—are busy weaving. To the left of this group is a woman pulling wool from a basket, another one is spinning with distaff and spindle, and near the centre of the scene are two women folding and piling on a stool a cloth that has already been woven. The loom is so carefully drawn on this vase that it was possible to make a working model of it, and even to weave a strip of cloth on the model in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.<sup>1</sup>

During the latter part of the 6th and most of the 5th centuries, there were plenty of paintings showing the life of Athenian women indoors and out. Plate XVI<sup>a</sup> presents a scene of girls, or young married women, washing themselves at a large basin.<sup>2</sup> In this picture, clothes are hung on the wall, as well as some type of head-covering, accompanied by an oil-flask. The girl on the left, who turns as though she has heard someone approaching, holds a sponge in her right hand. On another vase (Plate XVI<sup>b</sup>) there are four figures in a swimming-pool, one of them swimming in the water. About 500 B.C. a certain Peithinos painted on the outside of a cup a charming scene (Plate XVII<sup>a</sup>) representing young aristocrats of both sexes in conversation. There is a suggestion that they are flirting, and yet modesty is evident. The girls remind one of the enchanting marble *korai* on the Acropolis, and the date of many of these is the same as the date on the vase.

For outdoor scenes we may select two: Plate XX<sup>a</sup> shows a visit to the tomb of a parent, or brother perhaps. Two

<sup>1</sup> Where the vase now is, see *Handbook of the Greek Collection*, p. 58 and Pl. 37 i.

<sup>2</sup> The vase is in the British Museum.



young girls are present, both wearing the simple Doric *peplos*, and the hair of one is tucked up under a large beret-like cap. A basket containing offerings is held in the hand of the other girl. It is the anniversary of a death, and the things placed round the tomb are little oil-flasks, wreaths, and small woollen fillets.<sup>1</sup>

Beside this is set (Plate XXb) a famous little cup with polychrome painting on a white ground.<sup>2</sup> The exquisite drawing shows a very young girl in a thin, transparent *peplos*, standing on tiptoe to pick an apple from a tree. The same painter decorated another vase<sup>3</sup> shaped as a knuckle bone, with a bevy of young girls at dancing-school under instruction from an excited little dancing master. Fancifully this has been called 'The Dance of the Little Clouds', which suggests a kind of ballet (Plate XXIV). All three little masterpieces were painted about 460 B.C.

Finally there is a vase (Plate XVIIb) painted about 440 B.C. with a domestic scene.<sup>4</sup> The young mother is handing a child over to a nurse, the latter, of course, a slave, and probably a Thracian, like old Gerophso (Plate XVb), for she has shortish, fuzzy hair, and wears a sleeved jumper of Thracian type with a belt round the waist. Behind the nurse is a small loom, less carefully represented than the loom in Plate IX. The mother wears a sleeved Ionic *chiton* and beret, sits on an elegant chair, and has a footstool under her feet. Immediately behind her there stands her youthful husband, draped in a long cloak and leaning on a stick.

Many other typical scenes of the life of women are painted on vases; girls going to the public well-house to fetch water, visits to the shoe-maker, weddings, funerals.

<sup>1</sup> The vase, a white-ground lekythos, is in Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> In the British Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Both vases are in the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> In Toronto.



Clearly the old idea of Athenians as secluders and neglecters of their womenfolk must be abandoned. But how did it ever take shape as an idea? Probably as the result of the attitude which, for part of his life, Plato favoured, and which is most apparent in that famous dialogue, *The Symposium*.<sup>1</sup>

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes, each in his own way, had a studied attitude to the feminine half of humanity; each gave something through his art which we—astonished that each one of them so well understood women—can still perceive. Plato did not understand them.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as far as Athenians are concerned, we can perhaps learn most from the surviving writings of Aristophanes and Plato on this same subject. They were friends, able in a civilised way to disagree about many matters. Yet though Plato was endowed with the more brilliant mind, he was at a disadvantage because he represented two people—his master, Socrates, and himself—while Aristophanes was a single-minded, well-integrated man, and a poet of the highest rank. Socrates was about twenty years older than Aristophanes, and the latter about twenty years older than Plato. Socrates was executed in 399 B.C., at the age of seventy; Aristophanes died about 385 B.C., aged sixty-five or more. Plato lived to the age of eighty-two. However, with all this overlapping it is important to realise that Plato's writings represent the thought of two different persons, and we cannot always be sure which has the thought. Aristophanes, by contrast, represents himself, growing, changing, maturing—but a one-man entity.

<sup>1</sup> The best modern translation, by W. Hamilton, is in the Penguin Classics (no. 24), 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Except, perhaps, his mother.

Plato's *Symposium*, or *Supper Party*, is a dramatic and brilliantly designed dialogue written not earlier than 385 B.C., though the party is set back historically to 416 B.C., and Plato is not presented as a guest. Love is the topic discussed. Socrates is the main speaker, and ends by sweeping all other arguments before him, though he is deliberately made to do this by citing the teaching he received from a woman of whom he dreams as one wiser than he. The dramatic irony of this is heightened by the fact that one soon discovers that by 'love' the debaters are concerned with homosexual love; and to the great majority of us, this is frankly repugnant. However much we may rightly deplore our present orthodox morality founded on canon law deriving from the Mosaic code, we cannot agree with Plato's debaters in the view that the love of man and woman is something inferior, while homosexual love—sublimated though it may be—alone satisfies man's highest aspirations. When we read the *Symposium* we are 'listening in' to the thoughts and emotions of a small, rich, leisured clique, for it makes nonsense to suppose that marriage and love-partnership between men and women was a concept foreign either to most Athenian minds or to the views of Greeks in general. Any observant feminist learns in his youth that the female mind works along lines of thought different<sup>1</sup> from those of the male mind, a fact obvious to every percipient woman. Oddly enough, many men make the assumption which Plato did, that because the female mind runs on lines differing from the male, female thought is inferior. This, of course, is a regrettably arrogant attitude. Plato evidently fought against it, for if

<sup>1</sup> The best scientific and philosophical study of this topic is in Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, and especially in Part I, Chapter I; and Part III, Chapters I and III.

he had not done so, why Diotima in the *Symposium*? And why his women Guardians in the *Republic*?

And who was Diotima? A figment, say most scholars, of Plato's imagination. When the debate has attained a full flow by the end of Agathon's theories about love, Socrates, in order to refute him, politely remarks that the company must learn of "a woman of Mantinea called Diotima. She had other accomplishments . . . but what concerns us at present is that she was my instructress in the art of love." Indeed, the reported conversation between Socrates and Diotima is a long one, from which a few typical passages may be quoted in order to render its general tone. Diotima speaks first:

"Love is a great spirit, Socrates; everything that is of the nature of a spirit is half-god and half-man." "And what is the function of such a being?" "To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from the gods, prayers and sacrifices from the one, and commands and rewards from the other. Being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them, and prevents the universe from falling into two separate halves."

"The truth is that we isolate a particular kind of love and appropriate for it the name of love, which really belongs to a wider whole, while we employ different names for the other kinds of love."

"Now that we have established what love invariably is, we must ask in what way and by what type of action men must show their intense desire if it is to deserve the name of love. What will this function be? Can you tell me?" "If I could, Diotima, I should not be feeling such admiration for your wisdom, or putting myself to school with you to learn precisely this." "Well," she said, "I will tell you. The function is that of procreation in what is fine, and such procreation can be either physical or spiritual."



All this, then, I learnt on the various occasions on which Diotima spoke to me on the subject of love. One day she asked me: "What do you suppose, Socrates, to be the cause of this love and this desire? Look at the behaviour of all animals, both beasts and birds. Whenever the desire to procreate seizes them, they fall a prey to a violent love-sickness. Their first object is to achieve union with one another, their second to provide for their young; for these they are ready to fight however great the odds, and to die if need be, suffering starvation themselves and making any other sacrifice in order to secure the survival of their progeny. With men you might suppose such behaviour to be the result of rational calculation, but what cause is to be ascribed for the occurrence of such love among the beasts? Can you tell me?" I again confessed that I did not know. "How can you expect ever to become an expert on this subject of love, if you haven't any ideas about this?" "I told you before, Diotima, that this is precisely why I have come to you. I know that I need a teacher. So tell me the cause of this and of all the other phenomena connected with love."

Now, these passages alone are enough to show that Plato, who invented Diotima as a teacher for Socrates, was himself in love not only with his men and boy friends, but also with some feminine ideal represented by his Diotima. She was indubitably his 'idea' of womanhood, and ironically—but realistically—all the varied theories of various males at the supper party prove vastly inferior to the wisdom and reflection of a woman. Here is some comfort to the straightforward heterosexual scholar and student who finds Plato's *Symposium* to be a painful and regrettable document.

The women Guardians in the *Republic* are a part of that celebrated *Utopia* which is once more of interest as showing Plato's struggle against antifeminism within himself.





*a* ATHENIAN GENTRY FLIRTING



*b* ATHENIAN MOTHER HANDING CHILD TO NURSE



APHRODITE (THE KAUFMANN HEAD)

Opinions vary concerning the date of his work, but a year somewhere about 382 B.C. appears to be likely. It is in the Second Book that the Guardians are defined. The State, it is said, must possess a standing army, or class of Guardians, and the question is raised, how are they to be selected, and what qualities must they possess? Next it is stated that they must be strong, swift, and brave, high-spirited, gentle, and endowed with a sense of philosophy. In Book V the Athenians who are listening to Socrates' discourse beg him to explain in detail the community of women and children who form part of the Governing Class—the Guardians. With much reluctance he complies with their demand, and arrives at the inevitable conclusion that the women are to be trained and educated exactly like the men; for the woman is just as capable of music and gymnastics as the man. Socrates is speaking, and Glaukon replies:

"If then we are to employ the women in the same duties as the men, we must give them the same instructions."

"Yes."

"To the men we gave music and gymnastics."

"Yes."

"Then we must train the women also in the same two arts, giving them besides a military education, and treating them in the same way as the men."

"It follows naturally from what you say."

"Perhaps many of the details of the question before us might appear unusually ridiculous, if carried out in the manner proposed."

"No doubt they would."

"Which of them do you find the most ridiculous? Is it not obviously the notion of the women exercising naked in the schools with the men, and not only the young women, but even those of an advanced age, just like those old men in the gym-

nasia, who, in spite of wrinkles and ugliness, still keep up their fondness for active exercises?"

"Yes, indeed: at the present day that would appear truly ridiculous."

"Well then, as we have started the subject, we must not be afraid of the numerous jests which worthy men may make upon the notion of carrying out such a change in reference to the gymnasia and music; and above all, in the wearing of armour and riding on horseback. . . . When the Cretans first, and after them the Lacedaemonians, began the practice of gymnastic exercises, the wits of the time had it in their power to make sport of those novelties. Do you not think so?"

"I do."

"But when experience had shewn that it was better to strip than to cover up the body, and when the ridiculous effect, which this plan had to the eye, had given way before the arguments establishing its superiority, it was at the same time, as I imagine, demonstrated, that he is a fool who thinks anything ridiculous except that which is evil."

At this point perhaps the unbiased inquirer to-day may put a simple question: "What is known about the mother of this incomparable poet and philosopher?" Few such in the ancient records have had their mothers' names preserved, but Plato has. Her name was Periktione, and she was born about 450 B.C., the daughter of Glaukon I, who was a grandson of Kritias I, whose father, Dropidas, was a younger brother of the celebrated Solon. Her family was one of those few ancient and aristocratic Athenian families which claimed to trace their ancestry back to Homer's Nestor and Neleus and Poseidon. Periktione married Ariston, son of Aristokles, and these names themselves signify an aristocratic background. She bore him four children, Glaukon II, Adeimantos, Potone, and, finally,



Plato. Soon after the birth of this remarkable child his father, Ariston, died, but Periktione quickly married again, this time her maternal uncle, Pylilampes, a friend of Pericles and an important personage in Greek diplomatic circles. After a fashion it might be said that, judged by modern standards, this does not give us very much information about a particular feminine member of the Athenian aristocracy. Yet once again it must be emphasised that it is a rare thing for the mother of a great man to be mentioned in ancient literature, and there is good reason for assuming that Periktione was a woman who played a part in that brilliant circle within which the stars were Pericles, Aspasia, Sophocles, and Pylilampes. So much for Plato's mother.

Far too often that imaginary Supper Party called the *Symposium* has been treated by modern writers as a piece of historical fact; whereas it is simply a piece of evidence for one inveterate bachelor's state of mind when confronted with the problems of feminine nature. If he was one of those men committed to adoration of an exceptionally affectionate and brilliant mother; if he found all young women shallow and lacking by comparison with the maternal paragon, and if he were to be measured by the human standards of our own day, we should expect him to show a preference for homosexual company and to attribute to his revered 'Master' Socrates a similar preference. But we cannot know whether Socrates really frequented fashionable, leisured, homosexual cliques, such as were in no way typical of the ordinary Athenian citizenry, for, in contrast to Plato, Socrates came from a *bourgeois* background, being a working sculptor—perhaps not a very good one—son of a stonemason and a midwife; solid, hard-working parents.

Plato's parentage may explain that remarkable creation

of his mind—Diotima in the *Symposium*. She, the imaginary, the dream female, full of all sense and knowledge, is she the sublimation of Plato's mother? Even Speusippos, his successor and nephew, son of his sister Potone, felt the spell of grandmother Periktione; for it was Speusippos who, already in the 4th century B.C., originated the story that Ariston, being about to know his wife, was prevented, and a messenger of the Lord Apollo appeared unto him in a dream saying, "Fear not, Ariston, concerning thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of Apollo himself, and she shall bring forth a son." And Ariston knew her not until she brought forth the child. Thus might Speusippos have spoken; for the family looked on Periktione as a most remarkable woman.

There is no evidence for any psychological complications in the works of Aristophanes. We know that he was married, since the names of three sons are on record, but that of his wife is not known, neither is the name of his mother. Had his heroines, Lysistrata and Praxagora, some of the ways and thoughts of his womenfolk? Anyhow, this witty and uninhibited poet wrote, for women and about women, four plays: *Lemnians* (412 B.C.), *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae* (both 411 B.C.), and *Ecclesiazusae* (392 B.C.). The first does not survive, but the other three are complete, and the neatest way in which to illustrate his natural feminist outlook will be to summarise the three very briefly. Aristophanes did not idolise or idealise women, but he certainly understood them, was often exasperated by them, loved them, and liked them.

#### LYSISTRATA

In the year 411 B.C., when this play was produced, things were going badly for Athens in the great war against

Sparta which did so much damage to the whole of Hellas. Athens had her back to the wall and was fighting for her life, and sensitive and brilliant as he was, Aristophanes turned his mind rather desperately to think of desperate remedies. The thought came to him that the women of the embattled States might force peace upon their stupid war-making menfolk by insisting on the great Refusal. Certainly the play looks to the future more than any other play by Aristophanes, and this should make it "in modern times the most popular of the poet's compositions, and the fact that it has not been so is a sad tribute to the omnipotence of prudery, but the success of a not-too emasculated adaptation produced in New York in 1930 might induce the true son of the 20th century who is also a philhellenist to hope that his grandchildren may dwell in a clearer and healthier atmosphere".<sup>1</sup>

Lysistrata, the heroine, has sent the women of Athens to seize the Acropolis. While she arranges that, female representatives of various other states are to meet here and now as the play opens. When all is arranged, she unfolds her well-conceived scheme whereby the women of Greece shall compel their husbands and lovers to stop the war simply by refusing to go to bed with them. Considerable reluctance appears among the plotters, but the loyal support of the athletic Lampito, the tough delegate from Sparta, whose views are in complete accord with those of Lysistrata, ensures the adoption of the scheme, and the delegates disperse to their various cities promising to enforce the same rules among their sisters. When the scene changes to the entrance of the Athenian Acropolis, that

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Junior, *The Complete Greek Drama*, ii, p. 805. The versions of Aristophanes' plays in this volume are superior to any others known to me.



half of the chorus which consists of women successfully defeats the other half which is composed of bigoted and stupid old men. Several days elapse before the next scene, when Lysistrata is disappointed by various defections attempted because of feminine frailty. Ingenious excuses are presented by one girl after another as reasons for leaving the citadel and going home, when a magnificent scene occurs. Myrrhine, one of Lysistrata's most reliable young commanders, perceives her husband Kinesias returning from the war, and this wretched man is to be made "the fulcrum of the revolution's success". Myrrhine tantalises "her husband beyond all human endurance and finally leaves him much more tortured than he was before".<sup>1</sup> A herald arrives from Sparta whose appearance proves that Lampito has been as efficient as Lysistrata. "Are you a man or a priapus?" are the words of the Athenian official who meets the Spartan envoy. Others arrive. Lysistrata arranges a peace. And the comedy ends in general rejoicing.

The appreciation expressed by Sir John Sheppard<sup>2</sup> on this great comedy is brilliant and to the point. Lysistrata, he wrote, "is a living refutation of the doctrine that Athenian women were reduced by their secluded lives to blank stupidity".

#### THESMOPHORIAZUSAE

'Festival Women' might serve as an English title for this play, produced in the very same year as *Lysistrata*, but later. There was an annual three-day festival, for women only, held in honour of Demeter Thesmophoros, goddess of corn and ordered life. That is the setting for the comedy which is a fierce attack on the dramatist Euripides for anti-feminism shown in his plays. When the play opens

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *C.A.H.*, V, p. 142.



we learn that the women of Athens have planned to punish Euripides for insults and they are about to discuss his case at their meeting in the Thesmophorion. He believes that they will condemn him to death unless someone attends the meeting to defend him. Therefore he and his father-in-law, Mnesilochus, visit Agathon in Queer Street, begging him to impersonate a woman and speak in Euripides' favour. On his refusal, the father-in-law agrees to take on the job, is shaved, has his body-hair removed, and is dressed up in female garments. Next the scene shifts to the Thesmophorion, and the debate on Euripides begins. The fun soon develops into a riot when the women discover that there is a man in their midst. The Leader of the Chorus delivers a speech in which the virtues of men and women are compared, greatly to the advantage of the latter. Mnesilochus is now kept under arrest in the charge of a Scythian policeman, and Euripides, like a quick-change artist, appears in a variety of disguises in the hope of persuading the policeman to let the old man go. His last ruse succeeds when he appears dressed up as an elderly Madame accompanied by two little strumpets who lure the policeman away, and father-in-law escapes.

It has been said that this is perhaps the best comedy of them all. "Nowhere else do we find so perfect a blend of animal and intellectual ingredients embodied in a play so skilfully constructed and so artistically unified."<sup>1</sup>

#### ECCLESIAZUSAE

'Women in Parliament', a farce about Communism for all in a Welfare State, was produced in 392 B.C. By that time the people in Athens were becoming aware of the

<sup>1</sup> Oates and O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 865.

new ideas and thoughts which were emanating from Plato and his circle of friends. Although the *Republic* was not to be made available as a written work for another decade, the ideas which it offered to the Athenians were derived in large part from Spartan practice and custom so much admired by Plato, and in part from Plato's own brilliance and genius. Yet what he did compound held the elements of some phenomena which exist in our own day, like National Socialism, Fascism, Communism, and political—though not spiritual—Catholicism. The opening of the play recalls the *Lysistrata*. Praxagora, the heroine has summoned the women of Athens to meet her at dawn, each of them equipped with clothing, filched from their sleeping husbands, and false beards. The members of this admirable female chorus change their clothes before the audience, and Praxagora leads them off to Parliament, where they plan to seize control and establish a new order. Her husband now appears wearing his wife's clothes because his own are lost, and presently meets a crony just back from the Assembly, who reports that the session was attended by a great number of pale-faced persons who, following an eloquent speech, voted that the direction of public affairs be now entrusted to the women. Praxagora and her friends return, and are able to change back into their proper clothes, but the deed is done, and it has been decided that all possessions henceforth be shared in common. When one or two objections are raised, the news gets round that a free public banquet is about to be provided by the women, and the men accept the new economy with alacrity.

But the revolutionaries have established community of property not only in material things, but also in the relationship between the sexes. And it has been decreed that

the old and ugly are to have prior rights over the young and beautiful. At the end of the play there is a pantomime scene in which a handsome young man arrives at the door of his charming girl-friend, who looks out of a window to find him being torn this way and that by elderly, old, and older harridans who abduct him from the stage. The play ends with the departure of everyone for the feast. "The feminine triad (of comedies) consistently exhibits Aristophanes' wit at its most brilliant best, but this is only what would be expected by anyone candid enough to recognise that the sexual phenomena of human life are the most copious sources of the finest humour. It is regrettable and thoroughly human that those persons to whom this fact needs to be pointed out are invariably unwilling or unable to accept it when it is pointed out; *Lysistrata* is not for them";<sup>1</sup> nor are the other two plays.

Once again we must put the question which was put earlier in Chapter VII. How has it come about that scholars, in face of all this evidence, have too often said that Athenian wives were despised and kept in almost Oriental seclusion? The all-male life of the 19th-century public school and college inclined too many scholars to retrospective wishful thinking. In their daydreams they wanted to think of their beloved Athenians as people unencumbered, like themselves, by femininity. However, such scholars have been bit by bit severely upset by the revelations of archaeology, and to-day we know that it is Aristophanes—not the Plato of the *Symposium*—who expresses truly the feelings which Athenians had for their women.

<sup>1</sup> Oates and O'Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 807.



## CHAPTER NINE

### *The New Woman*

Emphasis in the preceding chapters has been on the life of girls and women in three famous regions of ancient Greece—Sparta, Ionia, and Athens. Because of the considerable literature and because of an abundance of archaeological finds, we know a good deal about life in those regions in the full Classical age. Nevertheless, there are gleanings to be had from other parts of the Greek world, and it is important to bear in mind the story, legend, fairy-tale—call it what you will—which was familiar to all little girls, bigger girls, and grown-up women in the ancient Greek world: the story of Atalanta. Her father, a local laird, longing for a son, was annoyed at having a girl-child, and had the infant exposed on a mountain near a cave. A lonely she-bear that had lost her cubs suckled the baby, who grew to be an athletic devotee of huntress Artemis. In time news spread that a monstrous boar was laying waste the land of Aetolia, and from various regions came famous hunters, including Atalanta, to kill the brute. The men, running true to form, refused at first to go out with a woman in the field; but Meleager, Prince of Calydon, who had sent out invitations for the great hunt, fell in love with the girl at sight and insisted on her joining in the chase. Some said that her spear was the first to wound the great boar, which Meleager presently killed, and so he gallantly gave her the mask, tushes, and hide of the boar. Much masculine ill-will



ensued, and attempts were made to rob the girl of her trophies.

Wrestling was in her line as well as hunting, for the story goes that she competed in the funeral games held for Pelias, King of Iolkos, and, wrestling with no less a hero than young Peleus, later the father of Achilles, she overcame him. Some said that she presently joined the Argonauts and pulled an oar with the other heroes all the way to Colchis; but others alleged that the skipper would not sign her on because her beauty would cause certain trouble among the crew. Perhaps it was after this that, according to one version of the story, her unworthy father decided to recognise his famous daughter, whose hand was now sought in marriage by many a well-known sprinter and miler in Greece. She was naturally both reluctant and ruthless; therefore the conditions for all suitors were: "Outrun the girl or pay with your life". The fairy-tale does not record how many died, nor is it consistent about the name of the splendid young man who at last won the race and the girl. Some called him Hippomenes, others Meilanion; and never forget that he won by the trick of throwing away gew-gaws to distract her. The girl was always the better runner. So they were married and started off on their honeymoon; but alas, concupiscence and carelessness combined to bring about an unfortunate result. It was a shady grove in a woodland glade where they lay down to rest and were mingled in love, not perceiving that this was a holy place, where their act was sacrilege. But some god saw. Promptly they were turned into a lion and a lioness. Who shall say whether this was a happy or an unhappy ending?

Now, if the story or stories about Atalanta were just part of the general stuff of Greek myth, they would scarce be

worth re-telling; but they are more than that, because the vast and varied and enduring popularity of these stories among the Greeks is the symbol of an aspect of ancient Greek life which nowadays receives too little attention—of athleticism among girls; whereas we all think of Greek athletics as only for boys and men. Atalanta is, in a sense, the feminine counterpart of those indefatigable heroes, Herakles<sup>1</sup> and Theseus, whose memory inspired every aspiring athletic Greek boy. The important point is that you only evolve, embroider, and recite legends about an imaginary athlete heroine because your civilisation affords some scope for young females to be athletic. No mediæval maiden ever stripped to wrestle with a troubadour; no virgin martyr ever raced in the Hippodrome against a saintly deacon; no houri ever left a harem to hunt wild boar on foot. The answer is "No scope, no legend". But where there is legend there is, somewhere, scope.

When Greek vase-painters depicted Atalanta, they tended to crowd into one picture allusions to several of her achievements simultaneously. The Athenian Kleitas, painter about 560 B.C. of the famous François Vase<sup>2</sup> (Plate Xa), represented the hunt of the great wild boar, and set beside the heroine, Prince Meleager of Calydon, who fell in love with her and gave her the trophy, as well as Pelcus, with whom she was later to wrestle, and Meilanion who by a trick beat her in the foot-race—later again—and married her. All the participants have their names written beside them. Atalanta wears a short tunic girt up round the waist, and her legs and arms are bare. When the older

<sup>1</sup> Kyrene, another huntress-nymph, was said to have strangled a lion—a "the Herakles", indeed! Kyrene attained goddess status even as Herakles became a god (see Pindar, ninth *Pythian Ode*); but she is not relevant to athletics.

<sup>2</sup> In Florence.

black-figure style was being replaced in Athens by the red-figure style, a painter named Oltos, who worked between about 525 and 510 B.C., depicted her wrestling-match on the side of a drinking-cup,<sup>1</sup> and a change of garb was introduced (Plate XIb). Peleus, like all Greek wrestlers, is naked, and Atalanta nearly so. But she wears a cap, to keep her hair and ears from being seized, and a neat little pair of shorts, upon which you may see embroidered a tiny lioness—prophetic of the fate that was later to befall her.

About 460 B.C. a new and more 'professional' presentation of her is depicted inside a drinking-cup<sup>2</sup> (Plate XIa). This delightful miniature shows Atalanta standing, facing, her name—*Atalante* in Athenian usage—inscribed above her. To her right is the winning-post in the stadium, and above it hang her oil-flask and her *strigil*, or scraper, which all athletes employed. In her left hand is a slender stick, such as umpires and trainers of boys often carry, and this is to remind you that she may personate the Games Mistress. She is, however, not dressed for running, but for wrestling; hence the tight-fitting cap with ear-cover and chin-strap, the brief shorts embroidered with a palmette, and the briefer 'brassière' embroidered with stars. Akin to this presentation is a picture, sadly fragmentary, upon part of what was once a large Athenian red-figure mixing-bowl<sup>3</sup> (Plate XIIb), painted about 440 B.C. Atalanta in the centre prepares herself not for running, but for wrestling, for this was the occasion when she defeated Peleus in the match. Her arms are raised above her head as she adjusts her close-fitting cap with its ear-flap, and she wears a fairly tight 'brassière' in which are openings to allow part of each breast freedom.

In the greatest of all athletic centres in the ancient world,

<sup>1</sup> In Bologna.

<sup>2</sup> In the Louvre.

<sup>3</sup> In Ferrara.



Olympia itself, some provision was made for girl athletes, as well as for the great champions of the Hellenic world. A body known as the Sixteen Women of Elis was a kind of standing committee of County gentlewomen. In the fifth book and the sixteenth chapter of his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias, the Traveller, reported that the Sixteen Women arrange every fourth year—

. . . games called the Heraia. The games consist of a race between the girls. The girls are not all of the same age; but the youngest run first, the next in age run next, and the eldest girls run last of all. They run thus: their hair hangs down, they wear a *chiton* which reaches to a little above the knee, the right shoulder is bare to below the breast. . . . The winners receive crowns of olive and a share of the cow which is sacrificed to Hera; moreover, they are allowed to dedicate statues of themselves with their names.

A wealthy Roman, perhaps of the 2nd century A.D., fascinated by one of these dedicated bronze statues, had a copy made of it in marble. The clumsiness of that copy has been worsened by some restorer, who attached to it false arms in wrong positions. But with a little care it has been possible to supply a reconstructed sketch of the lost original, reviving the appearance of a Greek 5th-century girl who won the race and dedicated to Hera at Olympia a statue of herself as she rounded the turning-post at the far end of the Olympic Stadium (Plate XXV). Her garb and hair exactly correspond to the description, cited above, given by Pausanias, the Traveller, who wrote in about A.D. 173 or 177, during the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, as an eye-witness to these races.

Yet another aspect of the life of women in ancient Greece remains to be mentioned before we pass on to con-



sider their status in the Hellenistic Age. This concerns the life of a particular class of women in the ancient city of Corinth, which must be regarded, after Athens and Sparta, as the third most important state in mainland Greece. The chief deity of this brilliant and prosperous city was Aphrodite, who in literature was constantly called 'The Cyprian' or 'The Paphian', after the famous city of Paphos near which she—the foam-born goddess—first landed from the sea. The girls of Cyprus performed a duty in her honour such as Babylonian girls did for Ishtar in Babylon. There it was a social rule that every girl once in her life must go to the temple of the goddess and, whatever her status, must offer herself once to any stranger visiting the precinct. From Cyprus, part-Semitic, part-Greek, the worship of Aphrodite was transferred to Cythera, off the southern coast of Peloponnesus, and at last her cult was established, perhaps as late as the 8th century B.C., in the great city of Corinth. The introduction to a Dorian Greek City state of a specialised though modified fertility religion was probably sudden, though the circumstances of its introduction remain unknown. The peculiar form of devotion and duty done for the goddess once by every girl in Babylon and Paphos was inappropriate to a Dorian Greek social framework. Nevertheless, the character of the goddess required feminine dedication and self-denial. Aphrodite needed her 'Religious', her servants who 'professed' their devotion; and a girl might find her happiness as a mystical hand-maid of the goddess. Devotion to religion was in the past and still remains characteristic of such girls. "It has been observed before that many prostitutes are religious, and the Catholic girls would not think of working on Good Friday, nor the Jewish girls on Yom Kippur. Many Catholic girls go to

Mass."<sup>1</sup> Anyhow, the Corinthian State handed over the cult duty to professional courtesans who lived in the precinct of Aphrodite on the splendid summit of Acrocorinthus, where they could practise devotion and poverty, since their earnings went into the coffers of their 'order'. As a result of this remarkable institution, the girls of Corinthian Aphrodite were held in respect and honour among the Greeks as a whole. Some came from the class of free citizens, as Athenaeus pointed out,<sup>2</sup> and others who had been purchased by donors were automatically freed by being given to the goddess herself. A measure of the respect in which they were held is the fact that an outstanding poet of the 5th century B.C., Pindar, wrote a eulogy for a number of Corinthian girls.<sup>3</sup> It so happened that a rich Corinthian citizen, Xenophon, entered for two events at the Olympic Games in 464 B.C., after having promised his city goddess a present of twenty-five girls should he be successful. He won. He then asked Pindar to write him an ode. Yet it is amusing to reflect that Xenophon himself receives a bare mention at the very end, while Pindar put all his enthusiasm into writing a charming eulogy of 'the gift' to the goddess.

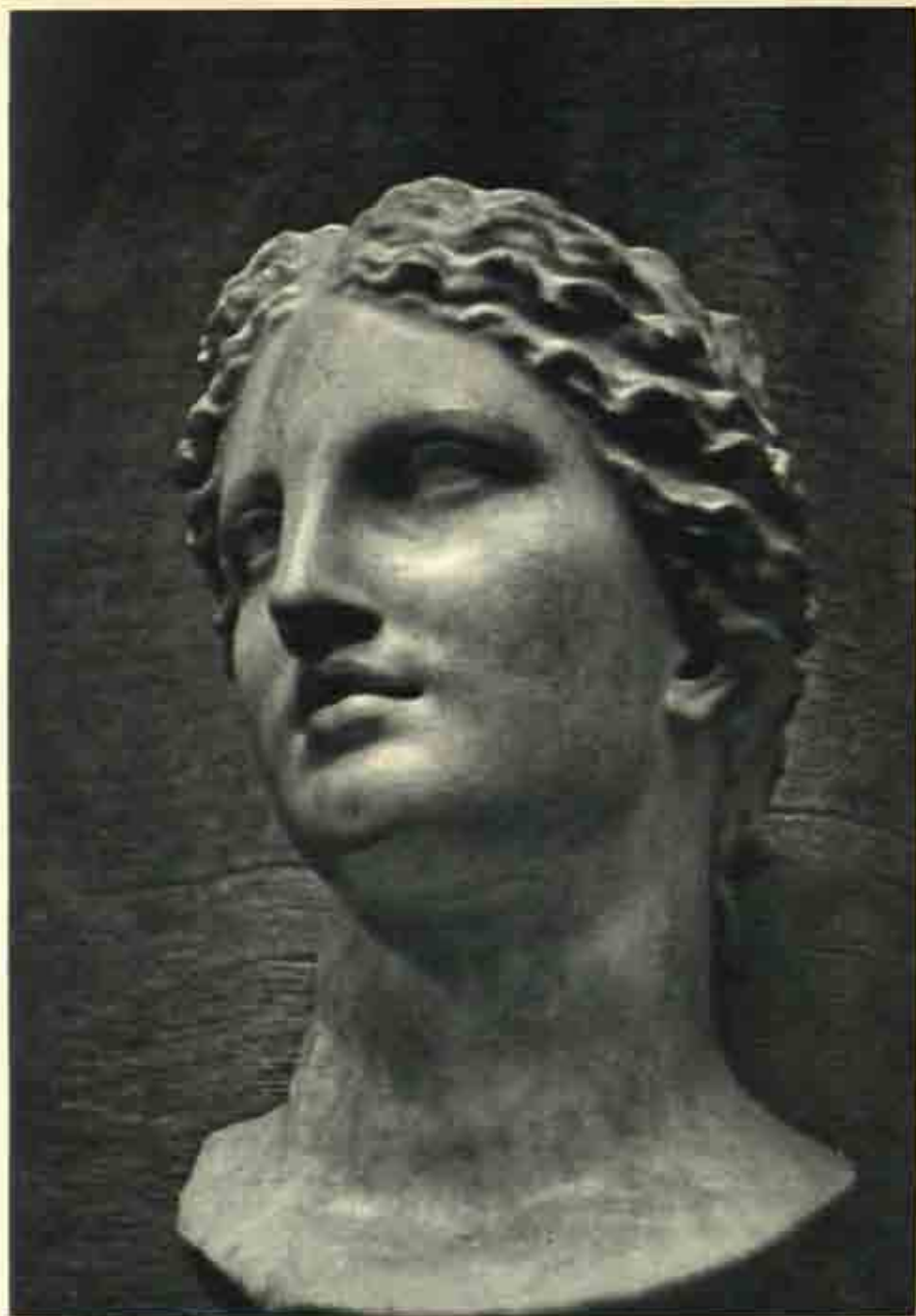
Young hospitable girls, beguiling creatures in wealthy Corinth,  
 You who burn the amber tears of fresh frankincense  
 Full often soaring upward in your souls to Aphrodite,  
 Heavenly Mother of loves;

To you girls she has granted  
 Blamelessly upon lovely beds  
 To cull the blossom of delicate bloom;  
 For under love's necessity all things are fine.

<sup>1</sup> B. L. Reitman, M.D., *The Second Oldest Profession* (1936), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *The Sages at Dinner*, xiii, 572, a, b.

<sup>3</sup> *Enkomia*, 122. See Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, p. 83.



APHRODITE (THE PETWORTH HEAD)



a, b GIRLS BESIDE A TOMB



c GIRL ON TIPTOE PICKING AN APPLE



Yet I wonder whatever the lords of Corinth will be saying  
Of me——!  
Devising as I am a prelude to sweet song  
All for the pleasure of anybody's girls!  
But we've tested their gold with a pure touchstone.

O Lady of Cyprus! Hither to your sanctuary  
Xenophon has brought fillies—  
A hundred limbs of girls—  
Glad for the fulfilment of his vows.

This is an elegant little poem, deep in its knowledge of love's fragility, light in its gentle mockery of his solemn self in unaccustomed role, and in the conceit of five-and-twenty girls as a hundred limbs for Aphrodite.

While reflecting on the lot of such girls as these, and on others in the ancient world, one should probably not adopt a Gladstonian compassion for the 'fallen woman'. More often than not the girls actually liked the life they led, since they were frequently successful in receiving pleasure in order to give it. A modern, instructive record concerning superior courtesans in New York<sup>1</sup> must be just as applicable to many a Phryne, a Lais, and a Rhodopis in the ancient world. The authoress, Miss Adler, at twenty-one was running a 'call-house' and her tale—sordid in parts—is impressive and well-told. No one could have better opportunity for studying the girls who took up the profession, and one notes that they were drawn overwhelmingly from the middle and even the upper reaches of Society. Both the Greek new comedy and patches of Latin literature carry evidence for similar situations. Generally

<sup>1</sup> Polly Adler, *A House is Not a Home*, 1954; note also the most favourable review of this book in *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 20, 1954. See also C. H. Rolph (Editor for the British Social Biology Council), *Women of the Streets*, 1955.

the reasons which these girls had for taking up the career which they followed were dissatisfaction with a boring, modest standard of life as well as desire for excitement, danger, and the wish to experience 'the other side' of modern civilisation:

No girl . . . sets out to be a prostitute. Such stupidity would be incredible. Who wants to be a pariah, a social outcast—treated with contempt, jailed, beaten, robbed, and finally kicked into the gutter when she is no longer saleable? . . . But in my opinion the greatest single factor [determining her choice]—and the common denominator in an overwhelming majority of cases—is poverty. It is true that, though many girls are poor, only a small percentage of them take to hustling. But there is more than one kind of poverty—there is emotional poverty and intellectual poverty of spirit. As well as material lacks, there can be lack of love, a lack of education, a lack of hope. And out of such impoverishment the prostitute is bred.<sup>2</sup>

The views expressed in this remarkable book find complete confirmation in a much more serious work, to which reference has already been made, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>3</sup> It is naïve, she says, to wonder what motives drive women to prostitution. The majority of women who take up the profession are normal, some highly intelligent.

The truth is that in a world where misery and unemployment prevail, there will be people to enter any profession that is open; as long as a police force and prostitution exist, there will be policemen and prostitutes, more especially as these occupations pay better than many others. . . . The prostitute would often

<sup>2</sup> Polly Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 530 f. A thoughtful and moving book by Caroline Brown, *Last Girls*, 1955, makes it clear (p. 13) that many such girls enjoy the life they are leading.

have been able to make a living in other ways. But if the way she has chosen does not seem to her to be the worst, that does not prove that vice is in her blood; it rather condemns a society in which this occupation is still one of those which seem the least repellent to many women. It is often asked: why does she choose it? The question is, rather: why has she not chosen it? . . . Most prostitutes are morally adapted to their mode of life. . . . They feel integrated, and with reason, in a society that manifests a demand for their services. It is not their moral and psychological situation that makes their lot hard to bear. It is their material condition that is most often deplorable. Evidently the situation cannot be changed by negative and hypocritical measures. Two conditions are necessary if prostitution is to disappear: all women must be assured a decent living; and custom must put no obstacles in the way of freedom in love.

We in our age have grown into the social pattern within which people either sternly condemn or regretfully deplore extra-marital sex relationships. Therefore, what many South Europeans still look upon as normal becomes, in the thoughts of most Mid- and West-Europeans, abnormal and is consequently driven underground. The quotations given above are relevant to a condition which is an essential part of humanity and, if we are to try to comprehend the ancient world and its point of view on such matters, we must divest ourselves of every inbred and every acquired prejudice—no easy task! Thereafter we may observe that Greek concern with human relationships was very different from ours. For one thing, the Greek admired without hesitation and without restraint every part of the human body. A story told by Athenaeus<sup>1</sup> about Phryne is a valuable illustration of this fact. It appears that there was trumped up against her a capital charge, but she was

<sup>1</sup> *The Sages at Dinner*, xiii, pp. 590 f.



acquitted. Hypereides, the Counsel, feeling that the defence of his client was not succeeding sufficiently with the jury, made her drop her garments in the middle of the court, and this caused the jury to feel such superstitious fear of one who was a servant and ministrant of Aphrodite that they promptly dismissed the case. It was, of course, this peculiar beauty of hers which moved Praxiteles the sculptor and Apelles the painter to employ her as a model for the goddess. The Greeks were always aware of deity in beauty, and to be in the presence of Phryne was to be under the special protection of Aphrodite herself.

Praxiteles, it seems, made a number of statues of the goddess, and Phryne sat for them. Many an inferior copy of some lost originals exists, but there are two heads which appear to be remarkably personal, and which some authorities hold to be originals from the master's hand. The model herself was youthful—perhaps eighteen—when the Kaufmann head was carved;<sup>1</sup> and ten years older when the Earl of Leconfield's marble was made<sup>2</sup> (Plates XVIII, XIX). Unmistakably the same sitter—and therefore Phryne.

In considering the dedication of Aphrodite's girls in Corinth, Paphos, and Sicily,<sup>3</sup> one must bear in mind the point of view brilliantly put by Gordon Rattray Taylor about women devoted to the goddess<sup>4</sup>:

The term prostitution with its connotation of sordid commercialism and hole-and-corner lusts wholly misrepresents the sacred and uplifted character of the experience as it was experienced by those who took part. It was nothing less than an

<sup>1</sup> Now in Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> Now at Petworth.

<sup>3</sup> Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, pp. 83 f.

<sup>4</sup> G. Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History*, London, 1953, p. 229.





YOUNG GIRLS LEARNING TO DANCE



YOUTHFUL GIRL WITH STILUS AND WRITING TABLETS

act of communion with God [or godhead] and was as remote from sensuality as the Christian act of communion is remote from gluttony.

Finally, it must be accepted that for the Greeks

. . . the procreative miracle was the ever-repeated proof of the existence of God, and the sign that His aim and nature was to create life and to dispel the forces of darkness, decay and death. It was the one solid reason for optimism in a world which must have seemed to them as dangerous and destructive as our own. They approached this recurrent demonstration of God's bounty and goodwill with holy awe, and, like Cretinus [*sic*], who replied to the [Church] Fathers' horror of the phallic by saying that man should not be ashamed of what God had not been ashamed to create, they carried in religious procession symbols of phallus and pudenda in all innocence.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing chapters have presented a kaleidoscope of the life of girls and women in ancient Greece. Little girls playing at bears in Athens, racing at Olympia, wrestling with the boys in Chios, going to school at the House of Sappho, or of Ainesimbrote, dancing to an enchanting song round Orthia's altar at Sparta; bigger girls as basket-carriers in Athene's great festivals, crop-haired slave-girls fluting at feasts, girls at the well, in the garden, beside the tomb, spinning, weaving; young brides dressed for the wedding, young beauties sanctified by Aphrodite in Corinth—all these have been observed. For the married and the older women the picture is just as varied in scene and colour. The 'secluded and despised' Athenian women, managing a household, bullying their husbands, running wild at festivals, going to the theatre, taking the occasional lover and the frequent jug of wine—these contrast with the

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 240 f.

landowning women of Sparta, assertive and bold, or the county gentlewomen of Elis, or the socialites of Ephesus, or the young matrons of Caria, Lydia, and Tuscany, famed for their beauty and light-hearted promiscuity, or the *betairai*, the girl-companions in any Greek state enjoying the freedom of the woman unattached.

Although Ancient Greece was made up of a large number of separate and independent states—some very small—the inhabitants of these scattered places were constantly meeting Greeks from other cities either at the famous temples and sanctuaries or at the great athletic meetings. That, however, applied mainly to the men, since, apart from contacts which Athenian women had with Boeotian and Delphian<sup>1</sup> women, the feminine Greeks rarely met their sisters from other states. Therefore their local ways and customs remained almost uninfluenced by the habits of women from neighbouring communities.

This state of affairs was completely changed as a result of Alexander's world-conquest and its corollary, the New Age, which we call Hellenistic; for the New Age brought in the New Woman.

The Greeks had passed through a period of disillusionment and frustration. The sunny future that the defeat of Persia had seemed to promise Hellas was eclipsed by interstate wars, civic faction, political corruption, and the failure of democracy, while Plato's high-minded philosophy was grasped only by an enlightened few, and his almost 'Christian' concept of God merely served, for the many, to draw godhead into incomprehensibility. Where was the good to be found? In the dialogue called *The Phaedo*, Plato, in quest of the clear truth, faced the extreme difficulty of its attainment.

<sup>1</sup> Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians*, p. 174.



A man must take whatever human doctrine is best and hardest to disapprove, and, embarking upon it as upon a raft, sail upon it through life in the midst of dangers, unless he can sail more safely and securely upon some stronger vessel—the word of a godlike man.

In every walk of life the Greeks began to feel the need for such a godlike man; and it was fulfilled in the person of Alexander. History has naturally placed most emphasis on Alexander the conqueror, the military genius. He was both; but ever since the brilliant researches of Sir William Tarn,<sup>1</sup> we have begun to perceive that these aspects were almost incidental and of far less importance than his achievements as explorer, civiliser, humaniser, and unifier of mankind. In 334 B.C., when he crossed into Asia, he fought one battle in which he beat the Persian satraps. Thereafter his road from Hellespont to Lebanon was the route of a liberator. To Egypt he came as saviour and uniter of two great civilisations. When the empire of Darius was ended by Alexander's victory at Gaugamela, the Graeco-Macedonian simply replaced the Persian dynasty; and, in the event, this new and more enlightened rule was wholly beneficent to the native population, among whom there gradually grew the cult of that now legendary figure, Iskander of the Two Horns, divinely good like the archangels of Allah. From Persia onwards Alexander's expedition to the East, terminating in North-west India and the Punjab, was a scientific exploration of a characteristically Greek type, bent on the accumulation and recording of knowledge.

For anyone who is not familiar with the whole scope of Alexander's achievements, the history of the mints of his empire can give us a brilliant picture of the tremendous

<sup>1</sup> See especially *Alexander the Great* (Cambridge University Press), 1948.

effect of his conquests, of his skilful employment of a uniform coinage as one means towards forcing the amalgamation of races, and of the grasp he had on the economic problems of his day. The types which appear on these coins in their millions were Athene, Nike, Heracles, and Zeus—that is to say, deities symbolising Wisdom, Victory, Humanity, and Godhead. A great number of mints, ranging from Sicyon and Pella in Greece and Macedon to Ecbatana deep in the Persian territory, struck these coins. The wealth came from the mines of Macedon, from the Royal Treasuries of the Persian Empire, and, later, from the age-old deposits of Egypt. And when Alexander died his coinage went on. His generals were an assembly of kings with abilities far beyond those of most men, yet without him they were lost. His personality dominated their minds to such an extent that for nearly twenty years scarcely anyone dared to change the types of the Alexander coinage. Were nothing surviving of the man save the buried hoards of his coins which have been discovered scattered over Europe, Africa, and Asia, we should still perceive that here had been one who had lifted the civilised world out of one groove and set it in another. The coins alone tell us that Alexander started a new epoch.<sup>1</sup>

Two things which were especially characteristic of Alexander were his complete indifference to his own well-being and his devotion to the service of mankind. In fact, he was dedicated to humanity through his 'action-philosophy', and the keynote of the whole was the Greek conception of *homonoia*, meaning 'being of one mind together', which was to become the expression of the world's longing for something better than everlasting wars.

<sup>1</sup> Seltman, *Greek Coins*, pp. 206 f.

That new epoch which Alexander introduced—that new condition of ‘being of one mind together’—was quite as important for Greek women as for Greek men, because Alexander’s zeal for the amalgamation of races did depend on the proposition that if you were to found new cities—and Alexander did—they must be based on the best model available, which was the Greek city-state. He and his numerous successors planted fresh Greek city-states all over the Near East. The great names there were Alexandria by Egypt, Alexandria by Issus (now Alexandretta), Seleucia on the Tigris, and Antioch on the Orontes; and the first and last of these were great, powerful, and influential all through Hellenistic, Roman, and early Byzantine times. The superfluous population of Greek states migrated in their hundreds and in their thousands to newly-formed growing cities such as these, taking their wives and families with them. Accordingly each great city became a new centre of Hellenism to which Greek women mixing with other Greek women born in various unfamiliar cities made their important contributions. The new woman, so much a part of our own ideas concerning womanhood to-day, was the product of these factors.

Among the idylls of the famous poet Theocritus there has been preserved what we should call to-day a sketch, written between 275 and 270 B.C. The scene is laid in the great Alexandria, at first in the house of a certain Praxinoa and later, after an episode in the street such as might be played in front of the curtain, inside the Royal Palace of Ptolemy and Arsinoe, where an exhibition has been set out for the benefit and pleasure of the Greek citizens of Alexandria. Praxinoa’s woman-friend is named Gorgo, and both are wives of Syracusan citizens who have migrated from Sicily and settled in the new city.



GORGO (knocks at the door and asks the maid who opens it): Is Praxinoa at home?

PRAXINOA: Dear Gorgo, at last! I am at home and I quite thought you'd forgotten me! (To the maid) Here, Eunoo, a chair for madam and a cushion on it.

GORGO: No, thank you, really.

PRAXINOA: Do sit down.

GORGO: Oh, what a silly I was to come!—what with the crush and the carriages, I have scarcely got here alive. It's all big boots and people in uniform, and your house is so far along the street. . . .

*Presently GORGO continues*

But come, dear, get your cloak and I want you to come and call on our mighty King Ptolemy to see the Adonis Show. I hear the Queen is getting up something quite splendid this year.

*A little later, as PRAXINOA puts on her cloak*

Praxinoa, that full pleating suits you very well! Do tell me what you gave for the material.

PRAXINOA: Don't speak of it, Gorgo. It was more than eight golden sovereigns, and I can tell you I put my very soul into making it up.

GORGO: Well, all I can say is that it's most successful.

PRAXINOA: It's very good of you to say so.

In the second scene the two ladies are having considerable difficulty in getting in at the doorway of the Palace because of the density of the crowd. However, a stranger helps them to get through, remarking:

Don't be alarmed, Madam, we're all right!

PRAXINOA: You deserve to be all right to the end of your days, Sir, for the care you have been taking of us. (*Turning to*



GORG0) What a kind, considerate man! (*They pass in*) That's all right. All inside, as the bridegroom said as he shut the door.

GORG0 (*As they move forward towards the embroideries*): Praxinoa, do come here! Before you do anything else I insist upon your looking at the embroideries. How dainty they are, and in such good taste! Hardly human, are they?

*Presently it appears, that someone is going to sing the famous Adonis dirge which is, of course, part of the celebrations*

Be quiet, Praxinoa! She's just going to begin the song. That Argive person's daughter, you know, the "accomplished vocalist" who was chosen to sing last year.

*After the dirge is over the little sketch ends with GORG0 speaking*

Oh, Praxinoa! What clever things we women are! I do envy her knowing all that, and still more having such a lovely voice. But I must be getting back. It's Diocleidas' dinner-time, and that man's all pepper; I wouldn't advise anyone to come near him when he's kept waiting for his food.<sup>1</sup>

This is all very *bourgeois*, yet young women like Praxinoa and Gorgo represent something new and different. The important fact is not that Theocritus, who wrote the piece, was an intelligent and sensitive feminist, nor that a brilliant thumbnail sketch of life in early Alexandria is presented, nor that the light small comedy pleased 3rd-century Greeks. No. The essential fact is that the thing survived at all to entertain for centuries people whose outlook on life was so closely like that of Greek Alexandrians.

Another kind of influence, which sprang from Alexander's conquests and from his zeal for the amalgamation of nations, grew up in the Hellenistic age, because the

<sup>1</sup> Extracts adapted from J. M. Edmonds, *The Greek Bucolic Poets*, 1919 (Loeb Classical Library).

impact of the West on the East was sudden and endured for a very long time. Nothing can better illustrate this than the way in which western ideas about women and certain western concepts of femininity were imposed upon the East. Queens and princesses became persons of consequence and, though marriages might be dynastic arrangements, the Greek and Macedonian women frequently governed by reason of a superior intelligence and superior gifts. Weak and ineffectual sons were on several occasions maintained on the thrones of Syria and Egypt by brilliant mothers who became the *de facto* sovereigns.

Fixed though the art of Mesopotamia and the more remote East was, subjects and even types were taken over from the Greeks and used anew. A little bronze figure, made about 530 B.C. in Sparta (Plate VIIa), represents a young naked athletic girl, still undeveloped and boyish.<sup>1</sup> The figure was part of a stand which carried a mirror and the girl herself stands upon the back of a tortoise, whereby the composition acquires stability. Some six or seven hundred years later there was made another little bronze representing a naked female, which served the same purpose as the Spartan figure.<sup>2</sup> Standing upon a tortoise and with a fitment on her head, which carried a mirror, this Parthian girl gazes into a hand-mirror held in her right hand and stretches out a long tress of her hair. While the Spartan child was unadorned, this girl wears a heavy necklace and bracelets. Perhaps she may be called Aphrodite risen from the sea, or she may be a votress of that goddess, who is also Ishtar or Astarte. The type of a naked goddess had come to the Greeks many centuries

<sup>1</sup> See p. 75 above.

<sup>2</sup> Now in the Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City.



FUNERAL PORTRAIT OF "HERMIONE GRAMMATIKÉ"



TOMBSTONE OF MYNNO A YOUNG SLAVE



before from the East<sup>1</sup>—ultimately from the very Mesopotamian region in which this bronze was probably made. The Ishtar-like subject has been altered and has become Greek in form, but anatomically the girl, with her aquiline nose, small apple-like cheeks and breasts, large hips and heavy thighs is not Greek at all (Plate XXXb). Nevertheless, since Alexander's day the Persians and Parthians, whose kings proudly adopted the official title 'Philhellene', strove to be as like the Greeks as seemed possible.

Alexander's influence spread far to the east of Parthia into North-western India, which remained under Greek dominion until about 100 B.C. Then the political power of the Greek kings and upper classes vanished with the invasion from Central Asia of the Saka Scythians, whose kings replaced the Greeks. But Hellenic culture and civilisation lasted on for at least another century, one aspect of this being the well-known Graeco-Indian art best represented at Gandhara south of the Kabul river and west of the Indus. The Buddha and Indian gods began to take their places beside the Olympian deities of the Greeks—especially on the coinage. A Saka king named Azilises, reigning about the time of the birth of Christ, put a voluptuous figure of the Indian love-goddess Lakshmi on the reverse of his coinage, which bore both Greek and Indian inscriptions. The fact that Lakshmi was at that time familiar to numerous Greeks may explain the presence in Pompeii, which Vesuvius overwhelmed in A.D. 79, of an exceptional and beautiful Indian work of art—one of the most startling finds yet made in that little city of surprises. Late in October 1938 the excavators found, in an annex of the 'House of the Four Styles', the remains of a wooden casket which contained an ivory

<sup>1</sup> See p. 33 ff. above.

figure  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high of the Indian Lakshmi herself (Pl. XXXa).<sup>1</sup> As the finders did not make it public for a year, it has remained little known to British scholars, deprived of Italian literature during the Second World War.

The Indian Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, bringer of good luck, mate of the god Vishnu, is in the hieratic attitude of a temple dancer; right arm raised and bent behind the head, left arm pressed to the body, the left hip thrown well out, the legs crossed at the knees. She is naked but heavily bejewelled. A long swag of leaves is over the brow and falls down her sides; a jewel rests in the centre of her forehead; a heavy necklace droops between her breasts, and between the navel and the *mons veneris* is a belt. Rings cover the fingers of the right hand, both forearms and both shins. On either side are figures, male and female, their heads against her hips; mortals, because they are only half the size of the goddess. This remarkable import from 1st-century India to Italy is unique, and older by over a thousand years than any other known Indian ivory. There is Greek influence in the figure as much as in the coins of the Saka kings of India, for her thighs have a Greek-like length, and if the breasts are heavy by Hellenistic standards, they are less 'aggressive' than those of the little bronze Parthian 'girl with a mirror' just described. Moreover, there are things about Lakshmi's face, the shape of her cheeks, eyes, and mouth that are all Greek.

Some discussion of the physical types which appealed to the ancient Greeks and of the features that they found beautiful in women must now follow.

<sup>1</sup> Photo Bruckmann, Munich. See Conte Corti, *Untergang und Auferstehung von Pompeii*, ed. 6, 1944, Plate 82. There exists other evidence for considerable trade between India and the Classical Mediterranean.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Pantheia*

Lucian, who flourished about A.D. 160, wrote many brief but amusing essays and dialogues, one of the best among them being a piece called 'Likenesses' in praise of a young woman named Pantheia, mistress of the Emperor Lucius Verus, her name suggestive of 'all-divine' qualities. She was an Ionian girl, a citizen of Smyrna, one of several localities that claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. For the dialogue Lucian invented two characters: Lycinus, who—happening to meet a friend, Polystratus—goes into ecstasies about a beautiful creature whom he has just seen. "Don't keep calling up fancies of miraculous loveliness," says the latter, "but tell me who the young woman is." "She comes from Ionia," Lycinus remarks, "whose cities have produced the fairest women." Asked to describe her he protests that words would fail him. Hardly could those most famous painters, Apelles, Zeuxis, or Parrhasios, hardly could sculptors like Pheidias and Alcamenes, have produced Likenesses to equal this girl of flesh and blood.

With that remark a theme is set, for Lycinus (Lykinos) is really Lucian (Lykianos in Greek), who was in his youth apprenticed to a maternal uncle, an excellent workman in stone, supposed to be one of the best statuaries. In a dialogue called 'The Dream' he tells how he abandoned the family calling for a life of Letters.<sup>1</sup> He did not, how-

<sup>1</sup> See Seltman, *A.G.A.*, p. 102 f.



ever, lose his interest in the works of long-dead masters, and so Lycinus, beginning with the Aphrodite of Cnidus by Praxiteles (Plate XVIII), starts a list of statues of lovely goddesses and brings it up to his little climax in which the imaginary sculptor, carving the ideal woman, would select features of beauties as follows:

From the Cnidian he takes only the head . . . the arrangement of the hair, the forehead, and the fair line of the brows are to remain as Praxiteles made them; and in the eyes also that gaze so liquid, and at the same time so clear and winsome—that too shall be retained as Praxiteles conceived it. But he will take the round of the cheeks and all the fore part of the face from Alcámenes and from Our Lady Aphrodite in the Gardens; so too the hands, the graceful wrists, and the supple, tapering fingers shall come from Our Lady in the Gardens. But the contour of the entire face, the delicate sides of it, and the shapely nose will be supplied by the Lemnian Athena and by Pheidias, and that master will also furnish the meeting of the lips, and the neck, taking these from his Amazon (Plate VIII). Sosandra and Calamis shall adorn her with modesty and her smile shall be grave and faint like that of Sosandra, from whom shall come also the simplicity and seemliness of her drapery, except that she shall have her head uncovered. In the measure of her years, whatever it may be, she shall agree most closely with the Cnidian Aphrodite; that, too, Praxiteles may determine. What do you think, Polystratus? Will the statue be beautiful?

Enthusiasm grows. What of this goddess-girl's colouring? "Call in the painters," says Lycinus, "and let them divide up the work!" She is to have hair such as Euphranor painted on the head of Hera, curved brows and that faint flush on the cheeks which Polygnotus gave to his Cassandra at Delphi; Apelles must paint the body as he





OLYMPIC GIRL RUNNER



a YOUNG GIRL DANCING



b YOUNG GIRL  
CARRYING WATER-JAR

painted Thessalian Pancaspe, the first girl-mistress of Alexander the Great, and at this point the reader of the dialogue senses a subtle piece of flattery, for if Pantheia equals Pancaspe, then the Emperor Lucius Verus equals the god Alexander. The next remark adds to this. The lips, says Lycinus, are to resemble those which Aëtion painted in his 'Marriage of Alexander and Roxane'. Homeric epithets crowd in to beautify our Pantheia, who is to have doe-like eyes, violet brows, and to be laughter-loving, white-armed, and rosy-fingered.

But as for the girl herself, she suddenly smiles and Lycinus, her devotee, goes into raptures about her teeth, their whiteness, and perfect regularity, and presently her voice is described:

The whole tone of her voice is as soft as can be; not deep, so as to resemble a man's, nor very high, so as to be quite womanish and wholly strengthless, but like the voice of a boy still immature, delicious and winning, that gently steals into the ear so that even after she has ceased the sound abides, some remnant of it lingering and filling the ears with resonance, like an echo that prolongs sound and leaves the soul with vague traces of her words, honey-sweet and full of persuasion.

All this artistry is but a literary conceit, since such composite carving or painting would produce a hotch-potch, not a work of art. Nevertheless, we may observe Lucian looking for the same beauties in womankind as men look for now. Another excerpt from the work of an earlier writer<sup>1</sup> provides a useful description of what may be called the 'ancient Greek Type' for both sexes. Antonius Polemo in the first century of our era wrote as follows:

<sup>1</sup> See *A.G.A.*, p. 67.

Where the Hellenic and Ionic race has been preserved in its purity, its representatives are naturally big people, broad, upright, compact, white of skin, blond . . . with yellowish hair, soft and nicely curly; the forehead square, with lips thin, the nose straight, the eyes liquid with much light in them.

This passage has been known to occasion some surprise because we tend to imagine—though wrongly—something rather different for the Greeks of to-day, taking as we do our impressions from certain familiar types—sprung from Cyprus or the Levant—who may speak modern Greek, though they have scant racial links with the old families, the peasants, sailors, and fishermen of European Greece, Crete and the other islands, among whom classical features can frequently be rediscovered.

A better way of estimating the physical characteristics of ancient Greek women—certainly a better way than hearkening to the rhapsodies of Lucian about Pantheia—is the switching of one's observation to representations in carving, drawing and painting of the womenfolk of all age-groups. Beauty is a word which may now be employed, though with some reservation since it is a difficult word, for it has been maintained<sup>1</sup> that between the aesthetic implication contained in a phrase like 'beautiful cathedral' on the one hand and the loose slang of a phrase like 'beautiful shootin'' on the other, there is the common and normal use of the word which means simply 'sexually attractive'.

When discussion centres around the appearance of attractive women a writer may use the words 'fine' and 'beautiful' as synonyms, though if no question of sex/appeal in a work of art is involved, he will do better to

<sup>1</sup> By Clive Bell, *Art*, 1928, and by myself, *A.G.A.*, p. 28 f., where I suggested that the Greek word *kalos* has the primary meaning of 'fine'.



stick to 'fine'. Physical attractiveness may sometimes be a dominant value in a picture or sculpture without in any way diminishing its significance as a work of art. *Per contra* sexual emphasis can dominate disagreeably in a representation the vulgarity of which effaces all fineness. While the second situation was sometimes present in both classical and Hellenistic art, it was rare; whereas in our day it is depressingly common. Indeed, most Greek likenesses of women show, according to the artist's capabilities, freshness and beauty which matches them to the images of Greek goddesses in their eternal youth (Plate XXVII). Infants and old women were not often depicted. Of the former a fine achievement of that Hellenistic art called *genre*—such as portrays scenes from ordinary life—is a marble group of a little girl riding a donkey which is in the charge of a peasant with Aethiopic features (Plate XXIXa).<sup>1</sup> She is a plump well-nourished baby of three or four years, sitting astride a saddlebag, the pockets of which contain some vegetables. The original was probably Greek-Alexandrian. Old women could be depicted with sensibility such as appears on a goblet by the Pistoxenos painter of about 470 B.C. (Plate XVb)<sup>2</sup> with the weary old Thracian 'nanny' named Gerophso, and in a life-size marble figure<sup>3</sup> of an old market woman, one of the finest of *genre* works of art, perhaps of the 2nd century B.C. (Plate XXIXc). This is full of subtlety for, tired though she is with age, she still has beauty in her face and it is clear that many years ago she once had the figure of a youthful goddess.

Quite young girls, boyish in form, were more frequently depicted in Greek art than were babies and crones.

<sup>1</sup> In Ostia, and found there.

<sup>2</sup> And see p. 122 above.

<sup>3</sup> Now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Their likeness to boys was obvious; for, as Simone de Beauvoir<sup>1</sup> puts it, "up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them". Excellent examples of such children are the two bronze figurines of naked Spartan girls (Plate VIIa, b)<sup>2</sup> and a little terracotta from the Greek mainland of a young dancer with a fancy hat and castanets (Plate XXVIa).<sup>3</sup> This entrancing little figure of the late 4th century B.C. looks as though she had just stepped off an ice-rink. Beside her one may set another child, slightly older, dressed in a formal Doric peplos, on her head a water-jar resting upon a porter's knot (Plate XXVIb).<sup>4</sup> She was found in Locris, north of Boeotia, and is a work of the 5th century B.C. With her one may class a contemporary drawing of about 460 B.C. on a famous cup by the Sotades painter (Plate XXb)<sup>5</sup>—the young girl trying to pick an apple just out of her reach.

Girls obviously in their teens were much in favour with vase-painters and with sculptors. First of them all comes that perfect marble, the 'Peplos' *kore* in Athens which many hold to be the loveliest of free-standing statues (Plate V).<sup>6</sup> A work of about 550 B.C., this combines formalism with life-like reality so that you perceive the moulding of her body under a woollen garment and the lift of her breasts gives the illusion that she breathes. A century later a bronze worker made in Athens a comparable figure of a girl fastening her peplos brooch on her right shoulder (Plate VIb). A later, well-cast copy which survives<sup>7</sup> once adorned the villa of a Roman Republican

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Now in Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> Now in Naples.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 75 above.

<sup>5</sup> See p. 124 above.

<sup>6</sup> Now in the Louvre, Paris.

<sup>7</sup> See p. 119 above.

millionaire. Another glance may be given at several of the vase-paintings of Atalanta mentioned in the last chapter<sup>1</sup> (Plates Xa, XI, XIIb), for these are all types of athletic girls almost unclothed but for their 'bikini-like' wear. Two naked figures, one painted, one carved on a bas-relief—four centuries apart in time—must serve to complete this brief sketch of young femininity among the Greeks. An Athenian, whom we call the Foundry painter, produced about 480 B.C. on the surface of a drinking-cup, a remarkable drawing of a flute-girl with full and high tip-tilted breasts, *retroussés* like her nose. Rare though such a formation may be, it occurs, and in some European countries is much admired (Plate XVa).<sup>2</sup> Her short and rather lanky hair is that of a slave-girl, but recalls a *coiffure* not infrequent in our time. The marble relief is a work of the 1st century B.C. (Plate XXIXb)<sup>3</sup> and represents a pair of lovers. The boy is given a satyr's tail, a touch part humorous, part romantic, but they are happy young mortals. Her long hair is caught up in a hasty knot on the nape of her neck; and, though this is but a minor work of art, her back and thigh and left arm are graceful and alive. Auguste Rodin's *Le Baiser* in the Tate Gallery is a composition even more erotic than the Greek precursor, and equal in beauty.

Such is the wealth of presentation of young womanhood in Greek art that a choice of types implies selection from an embarrassment of riches. Goddesses must be taken into account as well as mortals, for the Greek always envisaged godhead in human guise. Single monuments have always much to tell, but at this point it will be simpler to observe rather than to analyse, and to look for certain physical features which appear to be recurrent. Hair, worn long by the free, is sometimes loose, sometimes in plaits, and

<sup>1</sup> See p. 140 f. above.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 121 above.

<sup>3</sup> Now in Venice.



frequently dressed on the head in a great variety of styles which occurred contemporaneously. Faces are round but not too full, eyes wide apart, the nose straight. But when on some vase-paintings and on some later sculptures forehead and nose are set in a continuous straight line, this is due to hasty drawing which developed into a convention. Yet this continuous profile line does sometimes occur on individuals of both sexes to-day, especially among islanders; but it is unusual. No better examples of the Greek ideal of feminine beauty are available than two heads both of which are held by some authorities to be originals from the hand of Praxiteles. The subject is Aphrodite; the model was the celebrated Phryne.<sup>1</sup> The Kaufmann Head in Berlin (Plate XVIII) was carved when she was still very youthful; the Petworth Head (Plate XIX)<sup>2</sup> was made when Phryne, with whom Praxiteles remained in love, was a woman of about thirty.

Necks are well proportioned in Greek art, longish but not too thin; shoulders square, arms finely turned, long with neat wrists and tapering fingers (Plates XV<sub>a</sub>, XVI<sub>b</sub>, XVII<sub>a</sub>, XX<sub>b</sub>). Greek girls and women generally appear to have long bodies, and this is due to the fact that the breasts are usually set high, sometimes close together as on the bathing girls by the Andokides painter (Plate XVI<sub>b</sub>),<sup>3</sup> or on the Ionian terracotta Aphrodite (Plate XXVIII<sub>b</sub>),<sup>4</sup> sometimes wide apart; but they are normally shown as smallish or of medium size, which gives these figures at times a resemblance to the Egyptian New Kingdom ideal of beauty (Plate I)<sup>5</sup>. An exception is to be found on an Athenian vase-painting of about 470 B.C. (Plate XIV<sub>a</sub>)<sup>6</sup> depicting a young woman naked and laying her garment

<sup>1</sup> See p. 148 above.    <sup>2</sup> In Lord Leconfield's Collection.    <sup>3</sup> See p. 123 above.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 180 below.    <sup>5</sup> See p. 47 above.    <sup>6</sup> In Syracuse.



on a chair. Her development, unusual for a Greek since Homeric days, is more in the manner of certain opulent figures famous in Hollywood. At exactly the same period a different artist working in the manner of the Brygos painter produced the figure of a girl in the same attitude, but shaped in conformity with 5th-century taste (Plate XIV*b*).<sup>1</sup> Fourth-century ideals of feminine bodily beauty are presented in several marble figures of Aphrodite-Phryne after Praxiteles, and in a terracotta of a woman resting in contemplative mood after bathing (Plate XXVII).<sup>2</sup>

Some early figures show a narrow pelvic structure and small buttocks as though the artists had been more accustomed to depicting boys, but this style changes to fuller forms somewhat later. Generally legs are long and slender, feet well shaped; but very slender ankles are rare. However, the young girl aristocrats on an Attic vase painted by Peithinos about 500 B.C. are remarkable for beauty of both wrists and ankles (Plates XVII*a*).<sup>3</sup>

The result of this brief survey of Greek feminine types is actually very remarkable. There are many and varied kinds of beauty to be observed, and they all correspond to varied kinds of beauty commonly found among the girls and women of Europe and America to-day. But their appearance and their shapes contrast strongly with those of women in the mediæval world. The physique which people admired in that world was quite different from the developed and healthy physique of the classical and modern worlds, and it seems that the same standard of beauty is shared. Few to-day would be found to cherish the 'Venus of Willendorf' (*fig. 4*); even fewer, perhaps, to caress the pecky-faced, tubercular types, sloping of

<sup>1</sup> Now in Berlin.

<sup>2</sup> Now in the Louvre, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 123 above.

shoulder, pigeon-chested creatures with little piggy paps for breasts such as mediæval art portrays. The flat sculptured Queen of Sheba from Corbeil,<sup>1</sup> carved about A.D. 1180, or the weird unhealthy nudes which Cranach painted in the sixteenth century no longer attract. That figure and those paintings are, of course, in their own class admirable works of art. But the women who inspired them had shapes that do not now appeal, while the women and girls of classical Greece had shapes that do. They lived a very long time ago and yet resemble our women. Something, however, quite alien to female humanity, and therefore to humanism, intervened for centuries and affected a change in the physical as well as the mental characteristics of western European woman and man. The way of life fostered misogyny and the female body was denounced as something shameful.

The vocabulary of abuse between two persons of opposite sexes—lovers or spouses—can reach depths of bitterness. Unfaithfulness can be alleged in terms of exacerbating verbosity; hatred can employ a small armoury of Anglo-Saxon monosyllabic words. Yet the storm can, and often does, pass. But the anathemas of the Fathers of the Church were as marks of branding, ineradicable until death. Lovers can beg forgiveness both ways, and in the ecstasy of love they can forget. But when Saint John Chrysostom fulminated against one half of human kind, crying: "Among all savage beasts none is found so harmful as woman," then there was no forgiving, no forgetting. Woman became an outcast for as long as Chrysostom was held in veneration—a very long time.

It seems strange that the return of humanism—an intellectual affair—should produce the return of former physical

<sup>1</sup> Now in the Louvre, Paris.

shapes. Fashion in art will not alone account for it and we must recognise that models and sitters began to look different. Feminine creatures as painted by Botticelli about 1480 were still mediæval in outline and form; but Titian's women a bare thirty years later were already both classical and modern. Between those painters there lies, as it were, a centre-line dividing the feebler types of mediæval beings from their more robust successors. There had, of course, been lusty creatures before the 16th century, but they were exceptional; there were weaklings after the 16th century, but they have continued to grow fewer in most European populations up to the present day. Men and women are returning to the shapes of their antique, healthy ancestors.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Integration*

The Romans of Republican days were not in their social structures so very different from some of the Greeks as has been commonly supposed. Again the easy classification made by historians long ago, and still repeated, must be challenged. Women, and especially those women rather pompously labelled 'matrons', had—so it is irrelevantly alleged—rather more considerate treatment than Athenian women, but less liberty than Spartans. But what about their background? Too much has been allowed to pass as dogma about ancient Rome by reason of certain Roman parochialisms among some scholars who guided a fashion in Roman history; and the view is still expressed that the ancient Republic was a nest of all the civic and domestic virtues, but that the later Republic became a den of evil and corruption which swelled under the Empire into a palatial structure of undefinable vice. Things changed as the years moved on, but from the women's point of view they changed *not* for the worse, but very much for the better. In the early days we must note two very important matters. Firstly a girl was completely under her father's, a wife completely under her husband's, power. She was his chattel, and he had the right to kill her as he had the right to kill his children or any member of his household staff. This was called, somewhat mildly perhaps, *patria potestas*, or 'fatherly power'.

One observes that in Lord Macaulay's most Victorian



and melodramatic *Lay of Ancient Rome*, Virginius did no murder. The Bard will have it that the wicked Patrician Consul, Appius Claudius, cast a lecherous eye on the gentle schoolgirl Virginia and that he sent a minion to claim her as a stolen slave. Her father, Virginius, seeing only one way out, drew her a little space aside and broke into a long speech, some excerpts from which deserve recall:

And in a hoarse, changed voice he spake, "Farewell, sweet child, farewell!

Oh! how I loved my darling! Though stern I sometimes be,  
To thee, thou know'st, I was not so. Who could be so to thee?  
And how my darling loved me! How glad she was to hear  
My footstep on the threshold when I came back last year!  
And how she danced with pleasure to see my civic crown,  
And took my sword, and hung it up, and brought me forth my gown!

Now all those things are over—yes, all thy pretty ways,  
Thy needlework, thy prattle, thy snatches of old lays. . . ."

Virginius looks at the wicked Patrician Claudius:

"The time has come. See how he points his eager hand this way!  
See how his eyes gloat on thy grief, like a kite's upon the prey!  
With all his wit, he little deems, that, spurned, betrayed, bereft,  
Thy father hath in his despair one fearful refuge left.

He little deems that in this hand I clutch what still can save  
Thy gentle youth from taunts and blows, the portion of the slave.  
Yea, and from nameless evil, that passeth taunt and blow—  
Foul outrage which thou knowest not, which thou shalt never know.

Then clasp me round the neck once more, and give me one more  
kiss;

And now, mine own dear little girl, there is no way but this."  
With that he lifted high the steel, and smote her in the side,  
And in her blood she sank to earth, and with one sob she died.

The appropriate riot which naturally followed this piece of paternal exhibitionism is no concern of ours, but we observe that Virginius had an absolute right to kill his daughter if he so wished—even as a husband had the right to kill his wife.

The second important matter to be noted concerns marriage under the Roman Republic and its subsequent development in the Empire, and here we must take account of the devotion which the average Roman had to law. Indeed, the greatest of all contributions of Rome to civilisation is the insistence on law and an elaborate legal system as the main means to the maintenance of civilisation. In observing the somewhat complicated marriage forms which existed, grew, and became adapted to circumstances, we remain aware of the greatness of this Roman achievement. Roman law deprived Roman women of the protection which a Greek woman—including any Athenian—enjoyed, and in Rome her life was one of legal incapacity which amounted to enslavement, while her status was described as *imbecilitas*, whence our word. Naturally she had no say in public affairs or office, and was ranked as a permanent minor. The three forms of marriage were known as *conferatio*, *coemptio*, and *usus*. The first involved a simple religious ceremony in the presence of a Patrician acting as priest. The second was simply a fictitious sale of the girl's person by the father to the husband. The third and simplest was based on the result of a year's cohabitation. That is to say, any couple being unmarried and cohabiting for one year were automatically married. For sheer simplicity the nearest parallel is that which existed until recent times in Scottish law, whereby two people stating in the presence of witnesses that each took the other as man or wife were automatically wed. All three forms of Roman marriage

were described as *in manu*, which meant that the husband automatically replaced the father or other guardian, and that his wife came automatically under his *patria potestas*. Nevertheless, in time difficulties arose which led to the woman's comparative emancipation, for if the woman owned property the father or guardian was found to be extremely reluctant to hand all this over to the husband, and therefore in order that these paternal relatives might be protected a new form of marriage came in—*sine manu*, whereunder property remained in the father's control and only the woman's body in that of her husband. And now it became necessary for the state to intervene, taking advantage of the conflicts between fathers and husbands in order to limit their rights, and special courts were set up to deal with questions of adultery and divorce. The Roman legalistic interest and skill inevitably enabled women with the aid of sympathetic men friends to think out various ways of circumventing the law, and we find that under the Empire, when the laws still forbade adultery, some married women openly had themselves registered as prostitutes in order to facilitate their intrigues. As in Greece since the days of Solon, so in Rome since the early Republican times, prostitution was officially permitted, and in Rome there were two classes of courtesans: those who lived in *lupanaria*, and those known as 'good prostitutes', who practised their profession freely, although legally they were not allowed to dress like married women. While they had considerable influence on art, fashion, and dress, they never received the enormous admiration and respect that *hetairai*, or 'girl-companions', received in Greece.

Under the Roman Empire the whole situation became stabilised and thoroughly reasonable for women as a whole. For example, an Act of the Senate under Hadrian



conferred upon a mother, if she had three children and any of them died without issue, the right to inherit from each of them intestate, and from A.D. 178 onwards the evolution of family conditions was completed; children—not her male relatives—were the heirs of their mother, and she took a place of equality with the father. Finally, daughters inherited exactly like sons.<sup>1</sup> Roman history supplies a picture of women attaining gradually more and more liberty, a higher legal status, and greater power and influence. That is perhaps why the Roman matron is always thought of as a formidable figure. What, the question may fairly be posed, enabled and caused so marked an improvement in the status of women within the patriarchal and man-controlled Roman Republic? There are perhaps two answers to the question: in the first place, the influence of neighbours of Rome and early Latium, and, in the second, the monotonous frequency of wars.

As for the neighbours of the Romans and Latins, in a long, narrow peninsula like Italy these lay mainly to the north and south, the former being the Etruscans, whose customs have already been discussed.<sup>2</sup> Latins might define Tuscan liberty as licence, but Roman women learned about the possibilities of female emancipation. The other neighbours to the south were the inhabitants of many Greek cities of South Italy, which was known in ancient times as *Magna Graecia*, and with these must be grouped the splendid and wealthy Greek communities of Sicily. There can be no doubt that in all these Greek cities the cult of femininity was enthusiastically pursued, since the types on the current coins which passed from hand to hand in those cities at

<sup>1</sup> For a short, clear and up-to-date account of women in Rome, see Simone de Beauvoit, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 f. There are good articles in *O.C.D.* under the following heads: *Manus, Marriage, Women*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 90 above with reference to the liberty of their womenfolk.



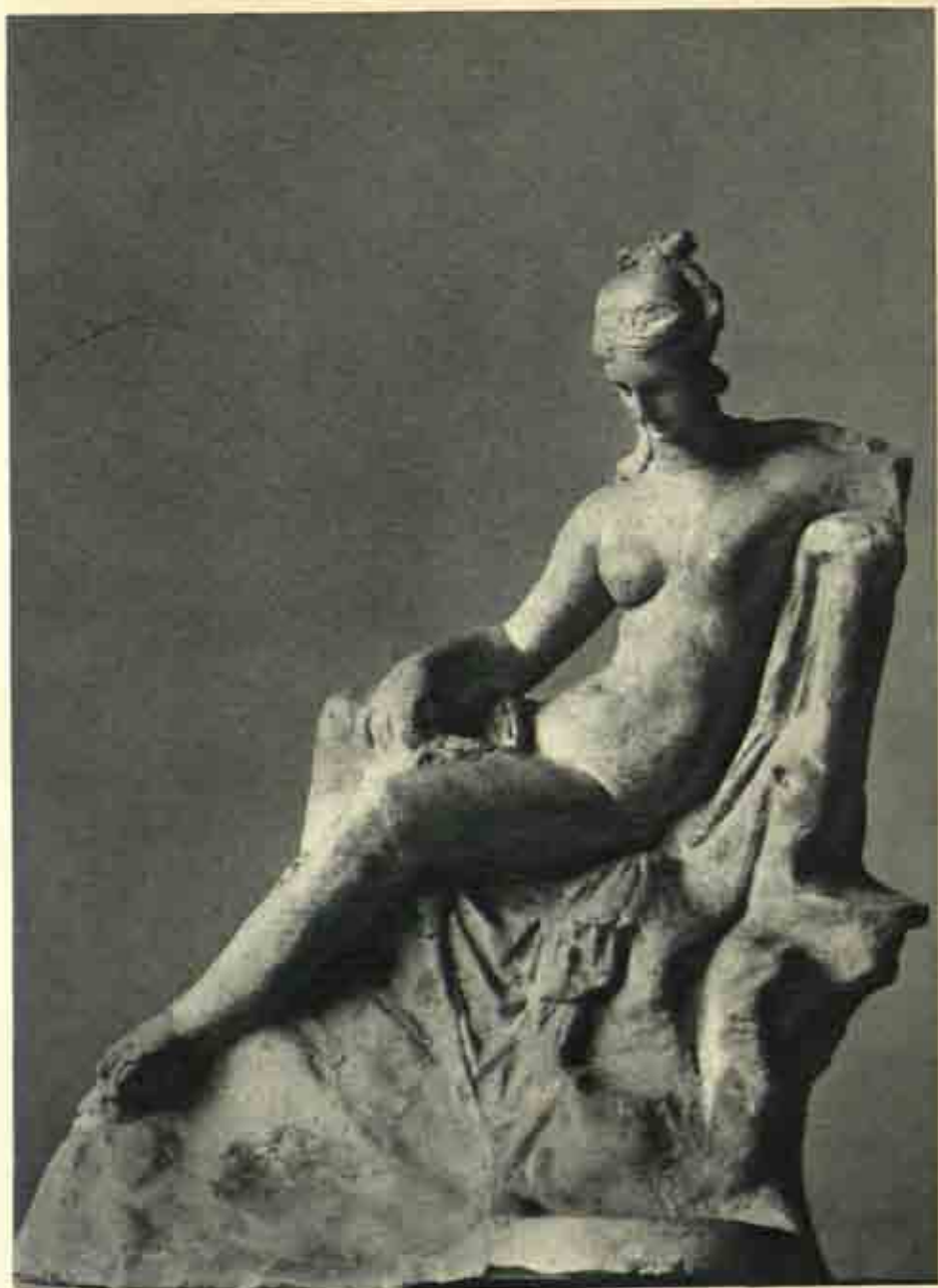
that time have a story to tell. We need to put ourselves into a frame of mind like that of the ancient Greeks and Romans in order to realise the great importance of coin-types in those remote times. To-day we scarcely look at the coin which we take out of or put into our pocket or hand-bag—save possibly to observe for a brief moment the portrait of a young and beautiful queen upon a new piece of currency. It has long been to historians a familiar fact that Greeks and Romans paid much attention to current coin, partly because minting was the only form of printing in the ancient world, and partly because coins, moving far out of the orbit of the issuing state, had a story—a propagandist story—to tell to the world without. Already in the 6th century B.C. numbers of Greek coins were appearing with heads of deities for obverse types; by the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. such presentations predominated. Within the orbit of mainland Greece, the Islands, and Greek Anatolia, the balance stands fairly evenly between the pictures upon coins of gods and heroes on the one hand, and of goddesses and nymphs on the other. Not so, however, in Magna Graecia and Sicily; for, although not all the coins of the Western Greeks bore heads as obverse or reverse types, since whole figures or animals might occur, head-types did predominate, and those head-types were far more often of feminine than of masculine immortals. The coinage of a great city like Syracuse hardly ever displays a god, but shows countless pictures of young girls representing the goddess Artemis Arethusa. The city of Segesta, at the western end of the island, likewise concentrated on feminine types. As for Italian Greece, when the greatest city, Tarentum, issued coins with head-types, they were almost always female, and the second biggest city, Neapolis, showed upon almost all its silver coins a head of the

nymph Parthenope. The same rule is common to other great states of that region, such as Metapontum, Velia, Terina, and Heraclea.<sup>1</sup>

The occurrence of all these exceptionally attractive heads of young girls representing goddesses and nymphs is evidence for the predilection of the Greek population of South Italy and Sicily, and for us it is a clear sign of their cult of femininity. This, coming to Rome from the South, from a region which all intelligent Romans held in high regard, must have had a subtle—and some stern Romans may have said insidious—effect.

Monotonous frequency of wars appears generally to confer more power on women because in the absence of the master more responsibility falls almost inevitably upon the mistress of the household. Whether it be Agamemnon off to the siege of Troy, or a Spartiate going to invest Messene, or an Athenian hoplite headed for Sicily and disaster, or Alexander riding to conquer the dusty and glittering East, the fact is clear that Clytaemnestra and Gorgo and Lysistrata and Olympias gain immensely in power. And though the gallant soldier may ponder on the possibility of an ardent wife taking the occasional lover, he will still feel his affairs to be safer in the hands of his spouse than in those of uncle, brother, nephew, or even son. Male relatives were better not trusted with money and estate in Ancient Greece. Since the Romans were given to waging wars even more frequently than were the Greeks, there is no matter for surprise that in Rome and Latium—just as farther east—the influence of women was steadily on the increase. Much of the power exercised by women among the Ancient Britons and Germans was due to the same

<sup>1</sup> See Seltman, *A Book of Greek Coins* (King Penguin), 1952, figs. 45, 46, 52, 73-9, 84-6, 89, 90, 92, 94-6.



YOUNG WOMAN RECLINING



*a* GIRL IN CLOAK



*b* APHRODITE  
UNVEILING



cause. And in the Middle Ages, even the splenetic misogyny of the Church could not prevent chatelaines of castles from gaining a most improper control of affairs while their lords went off to *Outremer* to redeem the Holy Sepulchre from the Infidel.

Though the principle is general, it is not, of course, universal in application. Yet one may observe that it took the First World War to give women the vote in Britain, and the Second to enfranchise the women of France, while in contrast that most democratic of free countries, Switzerland, unscathed by war for so many generations, is almost alone in refusing the vote to its female half.

By about 150 B.C. various centres like the many Hellenistic cities, the states of continental Greece, the Greek kingdoms of Syria, Egypt, Macedon, and Pergamum, the whole Roman-Italian peninsula with Sicily and the fine Graeco-Roman culture of Provence, were all mingling into a nearly uniform civilisation, advanced, brilliant, uninhibited, stable, and balanced. Mankind was the measure of all things in this, the first age of expansive humanism. And, because the Hellenistic epoch was a good epoch for women, one observes that many influential and admirable women rose to power and fame. Alexander's formidable mother, Olympias, comes first to one's mind, and one thinks of the Berenikes and Arsinoës in Egypt, of Lamia, brilliant mistress of Demetrius the Besieger, of Queen Amastris, and of that light-hearted assassin, Cleopatra, Queen of Syria, who on her coins was styled 'Queen Cleopatra Divine Plenty'.<sup>1</sup> In contrast are the solemn and virtuous Roman matrons with Cornelia, mother of the Grachi, as the most famed; and all of these in their differ-

<sup>1</sup> Like the later personified *Abundantia* of the Romans.

ent ways seem to lead up to the most wonderful of all the women of antiquity, the last Pharaoh of Egypt, Cleopatra VII. Since one about whom a large volume should yet again be written must here be dismissed in two paragraphs, we cannot do better than quote the story of her ending, as written by the greatest of her living admirers:<sup>1</sup>

Of the manner of her death no doubt should now exist, for it is known why she used an asp; the creature deified whom it struck, for it was the divine minister of the Sun-god, which raised its head on the crown of Egypt to guard the line of Re from harm. Once she was alone she arrayed herself in her royal robes and put the asp to her breast; the Sun-god had saved his daughter from being shamed by her enemies and had taken her to himself. With her died her two women; of how many queens is it written that their handmaids disdained to survive them? So Octavian's men found them when they broke in: Cleopatra dead on her couch of gold, with Iras dead at her feet, and Charmion, half-dead and trembling, trying to adjust the diadem upon her head. One of the men burst out: "Is this well done, Charmion?" "Aye," she said, "'tis very well."

The ancient world had little pity for the fallen; and it had little for Cleopatra. The hatred which Romans felt for her can be read at large in their literature; but through that literature there runs too another feeling, publicly recorded in the *Fasti*, and if Octavian's propaganda directed the hate, it did not create the fear. Grant her all her crimes and her faults; grant that she sometimes fought her warfare with weapons other than those used by men; nevertheless it was the victors themselves who, against their will, raised the monument which still witnesses to the greatness in her. For Rome, who never condescended to fear any nation or people, did in her time fear two human beings; one was Hannibal, and the other was a woman.

<sup>1</sup> Sir William Tarn, *C.A.H.*, x, pp. 110 f.

In the 1st and 2nd centuries of our era there were famous empresses who shared, like Livia, Plotina, and Sabina, the burdens of Imperial administration with their husbands, or even, like the two Eastern Julias—Domna and Mammea—who ran the machinery of government in the name of their inadequate sons. That part of history which takes pleasure in the scandalous prefers to dwell on lecherous tales about Messalina or Poppaea, and to assume that their way was typically Roman. It thinks rather of the younger Faustina's amours with a gladiator than of the elder Faustina's foundation of hospitals and orphanages. All this, however, is natural enough, for when Christendom became the vehicle for conveying the history of the Pagan world, the former was happy to retain any record which might smear the latter; while any normal man would even to-day imagine himself as preferring a dinner engagement with Poppaea to one with Plotina. The Graeco-Roman age both before and after our era seems in many ways strangely modern. One has to reflect on the fact that election posters painted on the walls of Pompeian houses are evidence that women proposed and supported candidates for municipal elections at Pompeii,<sup>1</sup> and one remembers that in the greatest Greek city of Asia Minor—Ephesus—social and religious matters came largely under the control of influential women known as Mistresses of the Robes.<sup>2</sup> Ephesus was the chief city of Ionia, and in the neighbouring province of Phrygia women were actually appointed to the responsible posts of monetary magistrates. Thus, in the city of Acmoncia during the reign of Nero, a certain Julia Severa, functioning in that capacity, set

<sup>1</sup> On the position of women in Rome and Italy, see Professor J. Wight Duff, *C.A.H.*, xi, pp. 752 f.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 94 above.



her name on the current coinage; and in a smaller town called Sibia during the reign of Caracalla a lady called Ailiane acted in a similar capacity. In view of what was to follow a century or more later, this was a truly remarkable state of affairs.

Alexandria was one of many places where women, as well as men, taught in academies. There is a well-known portrait, painted about A.D. 100, and preserved appropriately at Girton College, of Hermione 'Grammatiké'—that is Schoolmistress—her name inscribed beside her (Plate XXIII). Beside her one may observe the so-called poetess on a Pompeian fresco (Plate XXII). It is evident that letters were the fashion for young women in the Hellenistic age, and to modern eyes she may seem like a student ready to take down lecture notes.

Greek art both in the early Hellenistic Age and in the Graeco-Roman period naturally carried on a tradition similar to that which had gone before. Painting on vases—that admirable custom of an earlier age—no longer occurred, for vase-painters turned over largely to fresco work and other forms of art. In sculpture there gradually developed a great mixture of styles, and even in the most famous of all Hellenistic marbles—the Aphrodite of Melos, made in the mid-2nd century B.C.—there is a certain pretentiousness.<sup>1</sup> There is nevertheless one minor art of this period which retains a great deal of charm—the art of making terracotta figurines. Several examples are illustrated. One is a little cult-statue for some girl's indoor shrine representing a naked Aphrodite facing, with a small Eros at her side (Plate XXVIII<sup>b</sup>).<sup>2</sup> The other is one of the famous Tanagra terracottas.<sup>3</sup> It is the figure of a young

<sup>1</sup> Selman, *Approach to Greek Art*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> In a Cambridge collection.

<sup>3</sup> In the British Museum.



woman closely enveloped in a cloak, the folds of which emphasise the curves of her figure (Plate XXVIIIa). Little statuettes like these probably began to be made towards the end of the 4th century B.C., and represent an entirely new artistic departure, for earlier terracottas had either been made for purposes of cult or for giving to deities as votive offerings. Tanagra figurines, however, were household ornaments, the kind of object which a Hellenistic girl might have placed on the mantelshelf if there had been such a thing.

Inevitably the subtlety of feeling which the ancient world at this time knew towards women and girls is most definitely conveyed in the poetry of the period. Three gems may be selected from the *Greek Anthology*.<sup>1</sup> The first was written by Dionysios the Sophist in the 2nd century B.C.:

Rose-girl, fair as a rose is, what do you come to sell ?  
Is it yourself, or your roses ? Or them and yourself as well ?

At about the same period various poets were imitating the manner of that famous writer Anacreon of long ago, and among the imitations there occurs a little verse called 'Beauty's Power':

Nature gave horns to cattle,  
And hoofs she gave to horses,  
And nimble heels to rabbits;  
To lions mighty grinders,  
And fins she gave to fishes;  
To birds, their wings for flying,  
To men, wise understanding.  
Had she forgotten women—?

<sup>1</sup> Translated by F. L. Lucas, *Greek Poetry for Everyman*, 1957. I follow Lucas' dating of these poets.

*Women in Antiquity*

Ah, no!—she gave them beauty,  
Instead of shield and buckler,  
In place of pikes and lances.  
Ay, fire and sword are weaker  
Than a pretty woman.

For the 1st century B.C. we have some verses by a poet named Thyillos, called 'The Dead Dancer'.

Aristion, so swift once to toss her tresses curling  
And her castanets that rattled in praise of Cybele,  
Lightly beneath the pine-boughs to the horned flute's music  
whirling,  
She that would mix no water, as she quaffed her winecups  
three,  
Rests here beneath the elmtree-shade; now no more lovers  
Gladden her heart, no vigils of maddened midnight hours.  
A long farewell, all revels, all follies! Now earth covers  
The sacred head that once went bright with wreathed flowers.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *Misapprehension*

The girl Aristion danced, tossing her tresses. Her name is a diminutive and therefore emotional; an oddly aristocratic name meaning 'little best one'; but, since best is dearest, why not say it means no more than and as much as 'darling'. The Greek poet was saying—a little wistfully: "My darling danced under the pine-boughs, happy; but now is dead. A long farewell."

And a long farewell to happiness for almost all girls and women was fated soon to come, for real hostility to women was on its way.

At this point in our story about women in antiquity the reader will appreciate fully that I have been obliged to combat certain views, rashly though commonly held about the Greek world and the social standards within it. In the process of doing this, with the help of much-neglected evidence. I have naturally laid stress on the better aspects of life and customs. Yet I know well that every century in man's history—Greek to modern—had and has its dark corners, its skeletons clacking in cupboards, its seedy and sordid miseries. And whenever or wherever such things were or are in existence, there is found either the agitator or the idealist to clamour for a change—and society will always find the idealist the more dangerous of the two.

Under the glittering exterior of the Graeco-Roman world in the 1st century of our era there lurked as much of poverty, fear, and beastliness as pervades the world to-day.

But the Empire was so well-integrated and organised that an agitator could do nothing, except at the very highest level, as when he thought, and his army thought, that he would make a better autocrat than the current emperor. The idealist, by contrast, sought and found human material greedy for promises and prophecies, not on the ambitious powerful heights, but in the depths where hunger nagged and hope expired because any sign of divine benevolence did not appear. In fact the idealist found the same material to work on as the earnest Marxist finds now among depressed humanity.

Round about the middle of the 1st century of our era a new, idealistic, and Utopian conception of the cosmos began to exert upon the civilised world a slow, levelling pressure, as of an iron passed over fine linen. The content of this unofficial and unpopular concept, though of Jewish origin, was leavened by Hellenism, and it arose from the example, precept, and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem at the age of thirty-three in the year A.D. 30, and was claimed by His followers to be the unique divine manifestation on earth. From our point of view what matters is this: according to the received Gospels, it is clear that Jesus was a feminist to a degree far beyond that of His fellows and followers. An early public appearance was at a wedding; there are parables and episodes—not always clearly differentiated—with women as central figures: the widow seeking her mite, or giving it; the woman of Samaria with the outlook of a Greek girl-companion; a little girl, Jairus' daughter, brought back to health; the woman with a 'bloody flux' who touched the hem of His garment; Mary and her sister Martha; the "woman taken in adultery"; another who bathed His feet in perfume and dried them with her



hair; His Mother and the women at the foot of the Cross; the opened tomb discovered by Mary of Magdala—the twentieth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John is pure poetry. From the youngest to the oldest, from little children—half of them presumably little girls—whom He bade His followers to leave beside Him, up to the sick old woman, St Peter's mother-in-law, whom He cured, the Messiah was ever concerned with females as much as with men. No other Western prophet, seer, or would-be redeemer of humanity was so devoted to the feminine half of mankind. This cannot be too much emphasised because of the perversities of doctrine which ensued among male creatures professing not only to adore the First and Third Persons of the Trinity, but also to imitate the example of the Second.

The observation has frequently been made that a beginning of somewhat nonsensical anti-feminism was due, in the first instance, to Paul of Tarsus, though subsequently others, taking up the theme, wrote far more ungraciously about women than ever Paul had done. Several factors require consideration: the background of Graeco-Roman civilisation, with its real respect for women; the legal status achieved by women and their ability to fill responsible posts in civil life; the continuing love of female beauty expressed alike by poets, painters, and sculptors; and, lastly, a freedom in matters of sex—rarely indulged to excess—inherent in a society uninhibited at all class levels.

For a variety of reasons, all this really appears to have been repugnant to Paul of Tarsus. Conceivably the circumstances leading to his conversion had something to do with his attitude, since he witnessed the death of Stephen, the protomartyr, a young man of great beauty,<sup>1</sup> and his

<sup>1</sup> *Acts* vi, 15.

mind could have been temporarily unhinged by the sight of the torture. Indeed, it seems likely that Paul and Plato had something in their mentalities which was alike. That the former preferred male society seems beyond dispute as much as the fact that he shrank from anything like women in authority. It has been suggested that the time which he spent in Ephesus between A.D. 52 and A.D. 54 had something to do with crystallising his attitude to women. In such circumstances, Paul, a genius in rebellion against society, was bound to run into trouble; and letters he wrote from Ephesus prove that he spent some time in prison and believed his life endangered, though his Roman citizenship assured him of relative immunity. If he wrote some of those letters from prison, a good deal becomes clear; and a number of modern scholars hold that, while in confinement there, he produced two letters to the Corinthians, as well as a letter to the Colossians, and a letter to Philemon about a runaway slave-boy.

The letters to the Corinthians seem to reveal certain preoccupations that troubled Paul during his comparatively long residence in Ephesus. He had worries about money, idols, sex, and female liberty, and indeed he was most upset about sex and female liberty because he observed the absolute freedom, greater than anywhere else, enjoyed by the women of the city, and of all Ionia and Phrygia. But to Paul it all seemed great wickedness; and, endowed as he was with infinite courage, he dared to denounce it. His feeling came through in his letters from Ephesus to the churches of his foundation. Thus to the Corinthians he wrote:

To the unmarried and to widows I would say this: it is an excellent thing if, like me, they remain as they are. Yet if they cannot contain, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn [with passion]. . . .

Let those who have wives live as if they had none; let mourners live as though they were not mourning; let the joyful live as if they had no joy.

Man ought not to cover his head, for he represents the likeness and supremacy of God; but woman represents the supremacy of man. Man was not made from woman, woman was made from man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man. Therefore, in view of the angels, woman must wear a symbol of subjection on her head. . . . Is it proper for an unveiled woman to pray to God?

Women must keep quiet at gatherings of the church. They are not allowed to speak; they must take a subordinate place, as the Law enjoins. If they want any information let them ask their husbands at home; it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.

#### And to the Colossians:

Wives, be subject to your husbands; that is your proper duty in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, do not be harsh to them.

For Paul sex was indeed a misfortune withdrawing man's interest from heavenly things. Yet, in spite of all this, it would be a mistake to overstress Paul's preoccupation with inescapable misogyny, even if it was part of his own make-up. He, the Apostle of the Gentiles, produced long passages of superb writing which have ever since inspired mankind. But there were two disturbing aspects in the historical frame of his day, the first being Paul's belief in the historicity of Adam and Eve,<sup>1</sup> and his consequent preoccupation with 'Sin'. He failed to perceive that the doctrine of Original Sin, flung at the Graeco-

<sup>1</sup> The emphasis recurs; see *Romans* v, 12 f.; *I Corinthians* xv, 22 and 45; *I Timothy* ii, 13.



Roman world where it was an alien doctrine, enabled a man to account for the unpleasantness of his enemies and, indeed, of anyone whom he did not much like; an easy and hypocritical manner of judgment being provided by the doctrine. The notion of a communal guilt founded in ancestral sin is rather an ancient Jewish than a Greek idea. You cannot read history selectively, treating some events as though they had never been, so a famous modern Jewish writer<sup>1</sup> maintains, and if you are of Christendom you may not isolate only gentle aspects of the faith while you dismiss brutalities with some phrase like "Of course, that was not really Christianity!" Why not—men have asked—repudiate willingly the awful errors of the Church in history? The villainous attitude of some of the Fathers to women, embittered theological quarrels, cruel Popes, the savage treatment of Cathars and other heretics, the anti-Semitic ravings of Luther, and the iron rule of Calvin are all part of historic Christendom and to ignore them—says this author—is utterly dishonest. Perhaps he is right.

The other disturbing aspect in the historical background of the ancient world was this: as the Church increased in influence within the Roman Empire, it carried along with it the corpus of Pauline writings, and the implicit subordination of the female. The dislike, even the hatred, of women grew to be pathological. The subject is thoroughly unpleasant, yet may not, on that account, be ignored. But I prefer to set it forth by a quotation from another writer—Simone de Beauvoir<sup>2</sup>—whose authority in this matter remains uncontroverted.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Singer, *The Christian Failure*, Gollancz, 1943.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 184 f. Where she writes 'Christianity' I would write 'the Church', which is what she really means.



It is Christianity which invests woman anew with frightening prestige; fear of the other sex is one of the forms assumed by the anguish of man's uneasy conscience. . . . Evil is an absolute reality; and the flesh is sin. And, of course, since woman remains always the Other, it is not held that reciprocally male and female are both flesh: the flesh is for the Christian the hostile Other—precisely woman. In her the Christian finds incarnated the temptation of the world, the flesh, and the devil. All the Fathers of the Church insist on the idea that she led Adam into sin. We must quote Tertullian [end of second century A.D.]: "Woman! You are the gateway of the devil. You persuaded him whom the devil dared not attack directly. Because of you the Son of God had to die. You should always go dressed in mourning and in rags." . . . Christian literature [often] strives to enhance the disgust that man can feel for woman. Tertullian defines her as "a temple built over a sewer". . . . St Augustine [A.D. 354-430] called attention with horror to the obscene commingling of the sexual and excretory organs: "*Inter faeces et urinam nascimur*". Up to the end of the 12th century the theologians, except St Anselm, considered that according to the doctrine of St Augustine original sin is involved in the very law of generation: "Concupiscence is a vice . . . human flesh born through it is a sinful flesh", writes St Augustine. "The union of the sexes transmits original sin to the child, being accompanied, since the Fall, by concupiscence."

None will deny the presence of antifeminism in Imperial Rome as well as in Old Christendom. Juvenal's Sixth Satire betokens a rabid hatred of the other sex. Yet Juvenal is offset by Horace and Tibullus, and especially by Ovid with his enchanting *Art of Love*. We hear of no antidote to the phobias of Tertullian and Saint Augustine.

For too long the Roman Government made the mistake of not taking the Church's missionary movement seriously. At first it seemed no more than an odd Jewish sect, and it irritated the authorities mainly by its nonconformity to

certain usages and by its categorical refusal to admit the validity of any other religion whatsoever. Periodic persecution—often half-hearted—only encouraged the sectaries, and the Roman administration had as little knowledge of the sect's misogyny as it had of its belief in the alleged 'Fall of Man'. This is understandable, since the Church appealed in part to slaves and the very poor, and in part to the *bourgeoisie*, among whom its special attraction was often felt by elderly women who, despite some wealth, were disappointed with what life had had to give them. The anti-feminism of the Fathers was not, to them, important because they took it to apply to their female juniors. If modern parallels are to be sought, one may imagine a somewhat odd pattern within a religious frame holding the promises of Christian Science for the rich and of Marxism for the poor. This incompatible pattern won through to the overthrow of the ancient Paganisms because its exponents early developed an executive and directive priesthood modelled on the administrative structure of the Roman Empire. The Imperial Civil Service was paralleled by the ecclesiastical hierarchy because the appeal of the Church was primarily operative among city and town-dwellers in the midst of whom a Church could assume administration, once the new faith had been legalised by Constantine in A.D. 313. The very word *paganus* means 'country-dwellers', the people who long remained faithful to the old Gods, but on hostile lips *paganus* was a term of scorn—'yokel' or 'bumpkin'. Fortunately for themselves the country women and girls in their churchless villages found little to attract them to a religion engrossed with sin, and thereby ready to condemn them.

The final revolt and abolition—in Hadrian's reign—of Jerusalem, together with the last of the original apostolic

community living there, put an end to primitive Christianity, but left the Jews, now dispersed through the Empire, and generally town-dwellers, to come under the Church's influence. Great numbers of them probably became members, and among those who did not an anti-feminist attitude was taken over, the evidence for this being found in certain Talmudic writings of the time.<sup>1</sup> From every side things grew grey for women and their social status, save among the *pagani*—the country people—who must have included many inarticulate folk, passing their lives in their own quiet ways, unregimented by dogmas and unenslaved by obsession with sin. This was especially true in Mediterranean lands, which never quite shed the gentle simplicities of tolerant religion. Sicily, with its remarkable mixed population—Greek, Phoenician, and Saracen—was one land where ancient ways lingered long, as has been proved by the discovery at Piazza Armerina, in the heart of the island, of a great country house, rich in splendid mosaics, the home, from about A.D. 350 to 1070, when the Normans invaded Sicily, of a line of wealthy landed noblemen. It is safe to infer that they were people of the earlier faith; for the mosaics are pagan, and the remains of the house contain no Christian indications whatsoever. Perhaps the most interesting, certainly the most sensational, of the mosaics depicts eight young females indulging in exercises (Plate XXXII). They are running, using dumbbells, playing with a large ball or twirling fans, but the truly remarkable thing about them is the fact that they are represented as naked but for small bands of cloth which cover the breasts and the groin.<sup>2</sup> In fact, they wear the same

<sup>1</sup> G. Rattray Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 244 f.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Illustrated London News*, December 22, 1951, and March 8, 1952. A Roman-British girl's *brassière* of similar type with its knots still tied, discarded



kind of protection as appears on the figure of Atalanta shown on an Athenian vase of the 5th century B.C. (Plate XIa). It is surprising to find that the owner of this great Roman villa and the men who worked for him showed a total indifference to the Church's ethics as applicable to females. The picture of life lived among country people in central Sicily, where girls could still be gay, happy, and natural, may console to a small degree the historian who meditates on the general miseries of these times.

Monasticism dealt the final blow to the civilisation of the ancient world, beginning in Egypt as early as about A.D. 285, and in the West about A.D. 370. On this topic the pronouncements of Edward Gibbon still hold the field and remain, but for a very few small matters, unchallenged, since he devoted much time to the study of this subject.<sup>1</sup> Typical is his rendering of comments by Rutilius Claudius Namantianus (c. A.D. 414) on the monks of Capri:

The whole island is filled, or rather defiled, by men who fly from the light. They call themselves *Monks*, or solitaries, because they choose to live alone, without any witnesses of their actions. They fear the gifts of fortune, from the apprehension of losing them; and, lest they should be miserable, they embrace a life of voluntary wretchedness. How absurd is their choice! how perverse their understanding! to dread the evils, without being able to support the blessings of the human condition. Either this melancholy madness is the effect of disease, or else the con-

between A.D. 60 and 80, was found in October 1953 barely 100 yards from the Temple of Mithras in the City of London, in a well full of water-logged clay which preserved the cloth. See *The Times*, January 6, 1955, p. 2. Such a garment was worn not from any wish for concealment, but to protect the breasts during strenuous exercise.

<sup>1</sup> The main passages are in *Decline and Fall* (World's Classics), iii, pp. 232 f., 245, 277; iv, pp. 62 f.





a BABY GIRL RIDING DONKEY



b "LE BAISER"



c OLD MARKET-WOMAN



a THE GODDESS LAKSHMI



b PARTHIAN  
GIRL VOTRESS

sciousness of guilt urges these unhappy men to exercise on their own bodies the tortures which are inflicted on fugitive slaves by the hand of justice.

It was not long before a monastic life was also made available in Egypt to females, and that in no small numbers:

The stately and populous city of Oxyrinchus, the seat of Christian orthodoxy, had devoted the temples, the public edifices, and even the ramparts to pious and charitable uses; and the bishop, who might preach in twelve churches, computed ten thousand females, and twenty thousand males, of the monastic profession. . . . The credulous maid was betrayed by vanity to violate the laws of nature; and the matron aspired to imaginary perfection, by renouncing the virtues of domestic life. Paula yielded to the persuasive eloquence of Jerome; and the profane title of mother-in-law of God tempted that illustrious widow to consecrate the virginity of her daughter Eustochium. . . . Such rare and illustrious penitents were celebrated as the glory and example of their age; but the monasteries were filled by a crowd of obscure and abject plebeians who gained in the cloister much more than they had sacrificed in the world. Peasants, slaves, and mechanics might escape from poverty and contempt to a safe and honourable profession, whose apparent hardships are mitigated by custom, by popular applause, and by the secret relaxation of discipline. . . . But every age of the church has accused the licentiousness of degenerate monks, who no longer remembered the object of their institution, embraced the vain and sensual pleasures of the world which they had renounced, and scandalously abused the riches which had been acquired by the austere virtues of their founders. Their natural descent from such painful and dangerous virtue to the common vices of humanity will not, perhaps, excite much grief or indignation in the mind of a philosopher. The seventh General

Council prohibited the erection of double or promiscuous monasteries of both sexes; but it appears that the prohibition was not effectual.

Clearly the flesh was held to be an abomination, and in a man-made world the flesh was the other sex—woman, the temptress. The story of The Fall as given in *Genesis* was accepted as history because men had become disposed to accept it. There was soil—and there always will be—prepared to accept the seed of sexual discord. Whether or no Paul of Tarsus put to his followers and converts *intentionally* a block of anti-feminist teaching is something about which we are never likely to be certain. He could not foresee that his every sentence would be treasured; but, intentional or no, his teaching about women as interpreted by his successors continues even to-day to shock thoughtful persons. Those who reflect on the subject, from the late Frank Harris to Simone de Beauvoir—however diverse their backgrounds may be—appear in accord on this subject, and we may begin by quoting the latter, since she is both the most brilliant, the most learned, and the best-informed of our authorities:

St Paul enjoined self-effacement and discretion upon women; he based the subordination of woman to man upon both the Old and the New Dispensations. . . . In a religion that holds the flesh accursed woman becomes the devil's most fearful temptation.<sup>1</sup>

John Langdon Davies, despite a Catholic bias, can only deplore:

It is clear that whatever else in his own life and experience and in his own intimate psychology moulded St Paul's attitude to

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 120.



women, he was deeply influenced by a literal belief in the story of man's fall and also by a literal belief in the story of woman's creation from man's side: and although we are tempted to criticise St Paul, since it was through him that the offensive attitude towards women was finally expressed in the Catholic Church, we must remember that it was necessary that offence should come. The attitude was not simply that of one man, but of a stage in mankind's development. The rival sects which struggled with Pauline Christianity had little or nothing better to offer women.<sup>1</sup>

As for the American Dr. Ashley Montagu, at the risk of offending the devout among his fellow countrymen, in all honesty he is driven to strong, if tactful disapproval of the Pauline hostility to the feminine.<sup>2</sup>

Frank Harris, Victorian and Edwardian, an extravagant *flâneur*, brilliant, quick with his pen, a devout Christian, scallywag, has comments from another angle.

There are two essential desires in man: the one is for food, the other for reproduction. While both are imperious, the one is absolute necessity; the other, to some extent, adventitious. But while the desire for food is necessary and dominant, it has very little to do with the higher nature, with the mind or soul; whereas the *sex-urge* is connected with everything sweet and noble in the personality. It is in itself the source of all art; it is so intimately one with the love of the beautiful that it cannot be separated from it. It is the origin of all our affections. It redeems marriage, ennobles fatherhood and motherhood, and is in very truth the root of the soul itself and all its aspirations.

Now if religion had set itself to restrain eating and drinking, and to render immoral all descriptions of feasting or of every possible pleasure of the palate, it would have been within its

<sup>1</sup> J. Langdon Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Montagu, *The Natural Superiority of Women*, p. 126.

right. Doctors tell us that men commonly dig their graves with their teeth. The sad results of too much eating and drinking are seen on all sides. . . . Moreover, no one gets anything from eating and drinking but the mere sensuous gratification; they are not connected with any of the higher instincts of our nature. Religion could have condemned indulgence here, it seems to me, in the most stringent way, and been more or less justified. But instead of that, Christianity, mainly because of Paul, has attacked the sexual desire and has tried to condemn it root and branch. It doesn't preach moderation here as it should but total abstinence; and condemns every sexual provocation and all sensuous desires as if they were contrary to human nature instead of being the very flower of the soul. If Paul had been a dyspeptic, or even of weak digestion, there is small doubt that he would have condemned any immoderation in eating and drinking instead of sexual indulgence. And what a difference this would have made in all our lives, and how much more rational ordinary Christian teaching would have been.<sup>1</sup>

George Bernard Shaw, however, remains the most devastating critic of Pauline religion, and his views rested on his sincere admiration for the historic Jesus. In *St Joan* (1924) he supplied a damning picture both of the mediæval Church and of the Holy Inquisition. But behind this lay the reflections expressed both in the play *Androcles and the Lion* and even more in the preface to the play.<sup>2</sup>

Paul began by discarding Man as he is, and substituted a postulate which he called Adam. And when he was asked, as he surely must have been in a world not wholly mad, what had become of the natural man, he replied, "Adam is the natural man". This was confusing to simpletons, because according to

<sup>1</sup> *My Life and Loves*, Vol. iii (1949), p. 15. When Harris writes 'Christianity' he means what I am calling 'Christendom'.

<sup>2</sup> First published 1916; Penguin edition 1946.

tradition Adam was certainly the name of the natural man as created in the garden of Eden. . . . The Eden story provided Adam with a sin: the "original sin" for which we are all damned. Baldly stated, this seems ridiculous; nevertheless it corresponds to something actually existent not only in Paul's consciousness but in our own. The original sin was not the eating of the forbidden fruit, but the consciousness of sin which the fruit produced. The moment Adam and Eve tasted the apple they found themselves ashamed of their sexual relation, which until then had seemed quite innocent to them; and there is no getting over the hard fact that this shame or state of sin has persisted to this day. . . . Paul tells us definitely that he finds himself quite well able to avoid the sinfulness of sex by practising celibacy; but he recognizes, rather contemptuously, that in this respect he is not as other men are, and says that they had better marry than burn. . . . This view of the case inevitably led him to insist that a wife should be rather a slave than a partner, her real function being, not to engage a man's love and loyalty, but on the contrary to release them for God by relieving the man of all pre-occupation with sex just as in her capacity of housekeeper and cook she relieves his preoccupation with hunger by the simple expedient of satisfying his appetite. This slavery also justifies itself pragmatically by working effectively; but it has made Paul the eternal enemy of Woman. . . .

Howbeit, Paul succeeded in stealing the image of Christ crucified for the figure-head of his Salvationist vessel, with its Adam posing as the natural man, its doctrine of original sin, and its damnation avoidable only by faith in the sacrifice of the cross. In fact, no sooner had Jesus knocked over the dragon of superstition than Paul boldly set it on its legs again in the name of Jesus. . . . There has really never been a more monstrous imposition perpetrated than the imposition of the limitations of Paul's soul upon the soul of Jesus.

Though in the *Acts* Paul is only a revivalist, he comes out of his own epistles as a genuine poet, though by flashes only. He is no more a Christian than Jesus was a Baptist: he is a disciple



of Jesus only as Jesus was a disciple of John. . . . He is more Jewish than the Jews, more Roman than the Romans, proud both ways, full of startling confessions and self-revelations, tormented by an intellectual conscience that demanded an argued case even at the cost of sophistry, with all sorts of fine qualities and occasional illuminations, but always hopelessly in the toils of Sin, Death, and Logic, which had no power over Jesus.

Other evidence for this antagonism may exist elsewhere, for an eminent authority has pointed out<sup>1</sup> in a talk concerning the 'Dead Sea Scrolls', hidden in the 1st century of our era, that some scholars<sup>2</sup> believe the 'Teacher of Righteousness'—therein mentioned—is Jesus, while the person referred to in the texts as the 'Wicked Priest' is Paul. If true, this would confirm a very early hostility between Christ's Apostles in Judaea and the man from Tarsus.

No one is more aware than the author himself that this chapter is a 'one-sided affair'. But in a small volume which is devoted to the study of women in the ancient world one must face the fact that the opinions of Church Fathers, whose ideas replaced the teachings of Christ, appear to have been for women as dismal as they were unfortunate. For men, on the contrary, the Church, like Islam, carried much that was advantageous, for Christendom and Islam made available emotions, states of mind, and political conditions by which men could profit, in which they could revel, and through which power could be won and justified. Mithraism was even more of an all-male religion than others, but it was fortunately eclipsed. Taking, therefore, the one-sided feminist view, we are compelled to recognise that most women and girls were relatively happy

<sup>1</sup> Professor H. H. Rowley, *The Listener*, 1954, p. 995.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the Rabbinit J. L. Teicher.



in the first centuries of our era, but that thereafter happiness was in regression for all wicked daughters of Eve; and wicked they all were. Self-effacement, silence, concealment were expected of them, and no better symbol of this can be found than a comparison of two portait statues of distinguished women. First an imperial lady of the latter part of the 1st century of our era (Plate XXXIa),<sup>1</sup> her hair done in a style characteristic of the period. This is, of course, the work of a Greek sculptor using Greek marble, and he has shown the empress or princess, in the guise of Aphrodite, naked to the hips, with her garment slipping down after the manner of the Aphrodite (or Venus) of Melos. In this competent figure the artist has achieved his aim, for divinity is now added to royalty. In her thirties, this regal woman has retained a healthy youthfulness of body, and her awareness of the fact may account for the imperious self-assurance. Once again we perceive that great and important personages, if they are well-made, may show their bodies, but slaves and the poor had better cover theirs.

Yet our second figure (Plate XXXIb) represents no slave nor pauper, but another empress—this time a daughter of the Church. Aelia Flacilla lived in the second half of the 4th century of our era, and is represented by a well-known statue which shows the noble lady as swathed from neck to ankle, her arms with long sleeves, and with sloping shoulders which enfeeble her physique.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, she seems to be—from a spiritual and uncarneal point of view—desirably flat-chested. Instead of the secure pride of the 1st-century lady, we look upon distressful sorrow. There is an expression on her sad face that is more than humble, for

<sup>1</sup> In the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Numerous similar statues of great ladies survive.

<sup>2</sup> In the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

she looks humiliated. Indeed, her history is brief. She was married to the Emperor Theodosius, a gross creature who died in A.D. 395 of dropsy after a reign of sixteen years. But, though she gave birth to two future emperors and a daughter, she predeceased her husband by seven years, leaving him free to re-marry. So remarkable was she in virtue and orthodoxy that she was canonised under the name of St Placilla, and her feast is on September 14.<sup>1</sup> Clearly her reward was in another world.

<sup>1</sup> According to the Rt. Rev. F. G. Holweck, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints* (1924).

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *Atalanta Rediviva*

An old familiar saying attributed to Julian—the last Pagan emperor—was re-phrased by Swinburne in the famous lines:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; The world has grown  
grey from thy breath;  
We have drunken of things Lethæan, and fed on the fullness  
of death.

Nothing could be more remote from the truth. The Galilean—his peasant race were not 'pale' but sunburned and robust—far from conquering, was Himself displaced by the Church Militant on earth, disobedient to Jesus, seeking new ways to power; and it was this same Church which, after a kind of metaphorical re-crucifixion of the Founder, determined the overthrow of Paganism as subtly as it had overthrown the precepts of Jesus. The theology of Love which is termed Christianity, having become recast as Christendom, borrowed from the simpler nature religions Fear as the finest instrument for the attainment of power. It seems that the dominion of Christendom was due to the chance and unexpected combination within it of so many irreconcilable antipathies. This new religion, like its rivals, expounded stories of miracles and a theophany with recurrent emphasis on corn, wine, and blood; but, in contrast to its precursors, it was simultaneously aggressive and humble, exclusive and catholic, anthropo-

centric and misanthropic, pontifical and penitentiary, authoritarian and anarchic, redemptionist and comminatory, absolutionist and evangelistic, transcendental and purgatorial, sacrificial and apocalyptic. All women were doctrinally deplorable; yet one—the Mother of God—was ineffable. So complicated, confused, and contradictory a scheme of thought, conduct, and faith was bound to stultify independent human reflections by a numbing insistence upon the need to acquiesce in current dogma.

The shock of this 'New Outlook' was, to the more natural Pagan world, severe. Greeks and Italians through to the end of the Graeco-Roman Hellenistic Age had been people to whom joy was vital. They had often grown too happy to be diverted by gloom, horror, and superstition, and—most important—they were not enslaved by codes, nor were their honest thoughts cabined or confined by creeds. For these reasons they were, strictly speaking, not religious at all, since there was nothing to hold them back from the joys of bodily living.

An historian is concerned not merely with events, but also with man and with woman in history. Accordingly he may gain by carrying within him something of existentialist philosophy, setting in relief existence in its most personal aspect. Mankind exists first and is defined afterwards. Mankind can create its own world according to its choice. Man is the future of man. And that, of course, is humanism. As an historical religion with a Founder in Time, the Faith has meaning; but not so if it escapes—as it was already doing by the mid-1st century of our era—from the formidable example and precept of its Founder. Such evidence as we have makes it most improbable that He would have consented to the defamation of half—the female half—of humanity. Yet it was this line which led,



through a fear of woman and sex, to a terrible escape into vowed celibacy and chastity. In the framework of the mediæval and modern world most monks and nuns were quiet people dedicated not only to their ideals, but to a proposition called 'holiness'. But the huge monastic movement too often enabled a small number of fanatics to gain control of the well-equipped machinery of the Church. Many of these creatures were single-minded, simple-minded, dedicated, truculent, and not quite sane, for they believed themselves to be the consecrated instruments of God and they had that fear and hatred of women of which such men alone can be capable.

People in the Middle Ages were, in fact, slowly going mad because of the appalling code adopted concerning women:

The Church never succeeded in obtaining universal acceptance of its sexual regulations, but in time it became able to enforce sexual abstinence on a scale sufficient to produce a rich crop of mental disease. It is hardly too much to say that mediæval Europe came to resemble a vast insane asylum.<sup>1</sup>

Reflections on nuclear fission are to-day often said to be driving us towards madness; but that is as nothing compared with the wild thoughts induced by a faith founded upon a Heaven and Hell conception of the physical universe.

To the ordinary mediæval man the universe was no more than a three-tiered cake-stand—heaven, earth, hell—each on a plate. To the mediæval thinker and sage the universe was something better than three flats; rather it was like a Chinese ivory ball concentrically carved. The solid innermost core-ball was Hell, the next encloser earth, and

<sup>1</sup> G. Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History*, p. 19.

over this came layer on layer of moon, sun, and star-bearing spheres until the outermost of all—the empyrean, or Heaven. But the universe with its 'Harmony of the Spheres' was finite. The absolute necessity for an apocalyptic Heaven and Hell, both localised in space, was the first requisite of mediæval dogma; and when this fell to pieces the result for the fundamentally faithful was deplorable. Add to that piece of nonsense the actual fact that women are utterly desirable with the supposition that they are utterly evil—therefore headed for Hell—and it is obvious that many sensitive mediæval men who had not gone mad were going.

From the religiously induced horror of sex and woman mankind *must* find an escape, and within a patristic, anthropocentric, and paternal religion it was found in the cult of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. It so happened that the worship of the Virgin Artemis conceived as a living goddess lasted longer in Ephesus in Asia Minor than it did elsewhere. Nevertheless, in that city one virgin was slowly eclipsed by another. It occurred in the following manner: St John the Divine, presumed author of the *Apocalypse*, or *Book of Revelation*, was mistakenly identified with St John the Apostle, who received from the Cross instructions to cherish the Mother of Jesus. Since the St John of *Revelation* is held by many scholars to have written his work in Ephesus—precisely as Christian legend maintained—one can understand that his confusion with the Apostle John led to the view that he must have brought the Virgin Mary to live there.<sup>1</sup> Hence her dormition and assumption were localised in the place, and when Artemis was finally annihilated, the Virgin Mary took over much of her cult. But the aspects of a Mother-goddess were also

<sup>1</sup> On all this see especially C. Picard, *Éphèse et Claret*, pp. 709 f.

needed; for the fear and hatred of Eve, and of what she represented through the persons of girls and women, having become an obsession of male celibates, it was inevitable that relief must be found in the concept of a Mother-goddess. Naturally the mediæval Church was united to a patriarchal system wherein women were servants and dependants of men. Yet docile service and unquestioning obedience could redeem them, and these qualities were thought to exist in the Mother of Christ, handmaid of the Lord—who was at the opposite pole from Eve the sinner—Mary, who was the mediatrix of salvation, and therefore an offset to Eve, the mediatrix of damnation. Though virginity is negative and a grim frustration, it was what all pious male celibates most admired. In the Middle Ages “for the first time in history the mother kneels before her son; she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin—it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat.”<sup>1</sup> But from this there must grow forth the inevitable myth: the Virgin Mother of Christ does not die; she falls asleep and is assumed into the Realm above, there to become—as the doctrine develops—the Queen of Heaven. Meanwhile there operated subconsciously the age-old potent wish to regard Nature as Feminine and Godhead as female.

At all events males had one ideal female to adore, but this did not engender in them any better and more civilised attitude to their mortal womenfolk. Females privileged by birth and station, if within the frame of feudalism, were, of course, not unhappy provided that they were totally

<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *op. cit.*, p. 188. For the Catholic doctrine concerning the Mother of God presented in concise phrases see F. G. Holweck, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints*, 1924, p. 871.



devoid of all sensitivity. Such was the roughness of the feudal nobility of Western and Northern Europe that their womenfolk had to be not merely 'hard-boiled', but as hard as steel. There are still people to-day—including some mediæval historians—who would have us think of the Middle Ages as a tidy period of singing birds, fair ladies with wasp-waists and sloping shoulders, virginal knights in burnished armour, stained glass, and the odour of sanctity; all of it so cosy. Yet the truth is that, except for a very few literate great ladies and a few learned Religious, the people—from kings to serfs—were dull, dirty, dangerous, and disgusting. Not quite all of them, but most. For women who did not belong to the privileged class there were only four available careers: the *bourgeoise* wife-cook-housekeeper, the prostitute, the nun, and the witch.<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more difficult than to assess the general value of the Middle Ages from the woman's point of view, yet it may be said that mankind was heavily dependent on the acceptance of the miraculous, and on the validity of absolution, and that it had a moral complacency offset by a fear of moral deviation. Men and women were anthropocentric and geocentric, and the people who had the misfortune then to be alive were sexually frustrated because sex was periodically over-indulged and periodically detested even by the laity.

That which we call the Renaissance was, of course, a gradually developing movement. The main historical event which promoted it was the treacherous sack of Constantinople by the barbarous Western feudality, in consequence of which some Byzantine scholars drifted to the

<sup>1</sup> See Margaret Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, 1921; *The God of the Witches*, 1933.



West with their books and their knowledge of the classics and the Ancient World. Yet that would not have sufficed of itself had not people in Italy, Provence, and the Burgundian region been ready to receive these better things; for to all who were 'in the know' the Church was, because of its incredible corruption, becoming an abomination that grew worse century by century. But the true life, such as belonged to the Mediterranean in all its splendour, was bound to return. The coming of spring, the end of the long, hateful winter, is a recurrent theme of the mediæval Latin poets.<sup>1</sup> The earth was aflame, Love stood at the gate of summer, the satyrs were awake, the dryads had begun their dancing. In fact, Humanism came back and brought its own six cardinal virtues, the first three of which are common alike to the mediæval and the modern worlds, while the last three entertain the seeds of heresy. These virtues comprise sensitivity, intelligence, and erudition, together with integrity, curiosity, and tolerance.

In 1532 there appeared the first instalment of Rabelais' masterpiece, *The Heroic Deeds of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which must have seemed like a foretaste of the new spring, the end of the long hideous winter of the Middle Age. For we must keep these things in perspective. With all our reverence for the highlights of mediæval civilisation (Chartres, Dante, the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, Chaucer's belly-laugh), no one now pretends that any human being at all like ourselves could have enjoyed the Middle Age. For the vast majority of Western European men and women, the centuries that lie between the break-up of the Roman Empire and the fall of Constantinople were brutal, neurotic, priest-ridden, and malodorous. Dirt

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this and the following two paragraphs are quoted from an article by John Raymond in the *New Statesman and Nation*, August 21, 1954.

and repression, both of mind and body, were obsessive and all-prevailing. Whatever spiritual ligaments were torn at the Reformation, whatever the Renaissance may or may not have accomplished for the spirit of man, there can be no doubt that on a purely secular level life has been cleaner and cheerfuller for most of us ever since.

Rabelais deployed his big classical battalions. From Herodotus, his first love, he borrowed the easy-flowing narrative style that makes him the father of French prose. From Lucian he got his wit. From Pliny and a host of others his heaps of assorted learning. He was certain that this new world of scholars and libraries, of gunpowder and Greek Testaments and voyages of discovery, would change mediæval Europe immeasurably for the better. The misanthrope who sees history through the dark blinkers of Original Sin will sneer at him, but the humanist will find his faith refreshing and close to the faith of Erasmus, who, in England, could discard human sin and replace it by human folly.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally the Renaissance soon became a period of enhanced status for women. In Italy they were given an education similar to that of men and were regarded as their equals, even though it was held proper for them to work by influencing men, as did the women of ancient Athens, rather than to engage directly in politics. In other fields, such as the management of vast estates, they might take responsibility exactly as the women of Ancient Sparta and of Ionia once did. It appears that at that time a *virago* was a woman who was as good as a man, and the term was one of praise. Women were free to enhance their attractiveness with expensive clothes and cosmetics.

<sup>1</sup> See a brilliant account of this by Margaret Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (English Universities Press), 1949, pp. 91 ff.



a FLAVIAN PRINCESS AS APHRODITE



*a, b, c* PIAZZA ARMERINA MOSAICS: GIRL ATHLETES



Taboos on nudity were forgotten and the famous *espoitrine* in the Venetian manner was the fashion, rouge being applied to the uncovered nipples as well as to the cheeks. Perfumes and furs, delicate care of the hands and the fingernails, were admired and encouraged. For the first time since the days of Ancient Greece and Rome the courtesan, a lady of charm, intelligence, and education, living in her own house, holding court, the friend of men of influence both in politics and art, once more takes a place as important as that occupied centuries before by Rhodopis, Aspasia, and Phryne. The sense of guilt in sexual matters faded, and the Renaissance produced a superb flowering unparalleled since the days of antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

The 15th century was for the women of Italy a bright and cheerful period, and in the 16th that satisfactory state of affairs had spread to France and England. It was a first step forward on the road to a more reasonable and balanced life for everyone. Set-backs occurred, especially in the 17th century, for the Puritans of the Reformation and of the Counter-Reformation were anti-feminist in outlook; moreover, the brutality of witch-hunts was a fearful stain upon the epoch. The 18th century, carrying the Age of Enlightenment, marked once more a great improvement for females generally. But the coming of the factory system brought disaster to all such working women as left the land for industry, while the owners and employers, themselves frequently from narrow-minded Puritan backgrounds, were fiercely hostile to sex, and therefore to 'the other sex'. In such soil the seeds of the Victorian attitude to women were sown, and the era's wildest symbol was the grand piano, supplied with pantaloons to hide those

<sup>1</sup> On this complicated topic, the interested reader is advised to study in particular G. Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History*, Chapter VII.

awful things—legs. None the less, women were winning all the while; women's colleges, co-educational schools, degrees, the vote, academic and professional equality—not, however, in the Church—business posts, contraceptives, prophylaxis, birth-anaesthesia, every suitable type of sport, women have them all. Eve herself, treated in the Vatican Press as an historical person created from Adam some sixty centuries ago, is now exonerated. The *Osservatore della Domenica*,<sup>1</sup> defying the *dicta* of misogynist Church Fathers, declares that: "Adam was to blame because he should have had more common sense than to get excited over Eve. Adam should have given Eve a smart slap in the face when he was aware that he was gradually being seduced." The editor deplors the fact that Eve has always had to bear the brunt of the blame for introducing sin into the world as intermediary between the Devil and Adam.

This chapter had to be written because without some bridge, however slender, linking 'then' with 'now', the study of Women in Antiquity would have had no purpose, except—we hope—one of entertainment for writer and reader. Yet there must be an advantage in studying through past ages the life and ways of women as well as the attitudes and reactions of men to women, and in making the discovery that on the whole men do not come very well out of the situation. We can learn from the past and we can compare our ways and codes with those of the past. Two questions will then pose themselves, as follows: from the woman's point of view, "Can the clock be put back so as to place her once more in subjection?"; from the man's point of view, "How invincible is woman's present liberty?" To the woman's question the answer is, "Almost

<sup>1</sup> The passage from the Vatican Paper was quoted in the *Sunday Pictorial*, February 6, 1955.

certainly No!" Athletic freedom for girls and women has gone much too far. Some people hope for a revival of the Church's influence and power, forgetting that it can never recover its former sway unless it can set its face against and destroy athletics. In the early centuries of faith the great enemies of the new religion were not Pagan temples and shrines, not sanctuaries and theatres, but gymnasia, baths, hippodromes, and circuses. The conscious appreciation by a human being of exhilaration, of delight in his or her glowing, muscular body, the achievements of muscle and eye manifest in the hit six, the home-run with the bases loaded, the kicked goal, the smack with the hockey-stick, the straight drive on to the green, the long rally and the smashing victory on the Centre Court—the bodily delight in such things is but mortal sin! We have forgotten that the body is only a carcass built to carry an immortal soul through this vale of tears, that the body is here to be mortified, not be developed in its Pagan glory, that physical enjoyment such as comes from athletic fitness is *luxuria*, translated (among other words) as 'friskiness, frolicsomeness, revelry'. But indeed, *luxuria* is a deadly sin, and our civilisation has admitted girls as well as boys to its enjoyment and makes greater heroines of young female athletes than ever the ancient world did. All this the Church has permitted, even to girls in convent schools playing hockey and tennis. In fact, the pass has been sold, and Atalanta is back again.

To the man's question the answer is: "Woman's liberty is now invincible."

Man, and that means mankind, is the measure of all things, and to-day perhaps it is the young female of mankind (with her own emphasis on measurements) who has become the measure of all things. Never has young



womanhood been so absorbing to others and so absorbed in herself. Atalanta, back again, is the eternal symbol of joy; but the joy is short, of course. It is not merely old Omar's trite remark about spring vanishing with the rose which conveys the sadness behind the joy. Many years of academic life, many of travel, have shown me that the young female of our species has more of gaiety, of zest, than has her brother. That it does not last is tragic, but in fact inescapable. He begins to attain his best when his twin-sister is starting to fade. However, fading into a career is rarely her ambition, for to-day it becomes clear that what the young woman—future mother, ultimate grandmother—most desires within the strange, cramped social framework of our age is the capture of a husband. Among the workers or lower-income groups the pursuit starts early with those now referred to as 'teen-agers'. Youth clubs cease to attract the young girl. Church activities are conceived of as 'children's affairs', 'all talk and no do', but dancing is an adult occupation, and the girl with unswerving concentration sets out to get her man.<sup>1</sup>

Among the rather higher income groups represented by young women of attainment, such as scholars in universities, much the same state of affairs prevails, though their attack is less direct and though it occurs in the 'twenties' instead of the 'teens'. The attenuated and fragile social groups from Mayfair and the Shires share the same outlook and desires, though the approaches may appear to be either more etiolated or more hearty. Yet in all these groups it is both the slapdash simplicity and the confident careless optimism which have their appeal, and which an

<sup>1</sup> Very much to the point is a slender volume recently published and sponsored by King George's Jubilee Trust, compiled by Pearl Jephcott, and entitled *Some Young People* (Allen & Unwin), 1954.



honest uninhibited man will cherish. There are contemporaries who, learning of this state of affairs, will raise the eyebrow of disapprobation; others, younger, will smile; yet others, the youngest, will laugh and go their ways, never knowing that their ways now are the ways of other girls in antiquity.

A student of the humanities is pleased to observe that his own world of to-day continues to be indebted to that ancient classical world which has been the abiding passion of his life and studies, and it is when he observes the women of to-day that he is most aware of their debt—mainly unconscious—to antiquity. The male half of humanity has perhaps moved too fast and too far in recent centuries; the female half has retained a richer rhythm and has recovered—with ancient freedoms now regained—a better grasp of reality. We may not over-value human beings of either sex, but we may join Erasmus in holding the globe to be peopled by a great company of the foolish. So it was, too, very long ago when, none the less, qualities of goodness and fineness also existed. Because some ancient qualities are reappearing in this century it is tempting to suggest that a woman of to-day owes more than she thinks or knows to a remoter Mediterranean and European past. She has from Ancient Egypt her *maquillage* and her love of clothes revealing and concealing. Like Atalanta, patroness of sports, she is not ashamed of her body and sometimes she has all the coquetry of Anthea. She will allow the camera to record her as once the painter and sculptor recorded Phryne. Sometimes she faces sun and sea garbed like the girls of Piazza Armerina, or dances solemnly like the Spartans, or jazz-like as the Thyiads of Athens and Delphi. Like Praxinoa, she can be domestic, but not crushed under domesticity, and she

has the advantage of visiting 'the pictures' more often than Athenian women visited the Theatre of Dionysos. Like Lysistra, she can always subdue her male by declaring a lock-out, and, with all this, like the cave-woman of old, she remains an improviser by contrast with her man, the planner. Society has need of both.

# A Short Bibliography

## Some abbreviations used:

- A.G.A: Charles Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 1948.  
C.A.H: *Cambridge Ancient History*.  
O.C.D: *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.  
RE: *Real-Encyclopädie*.

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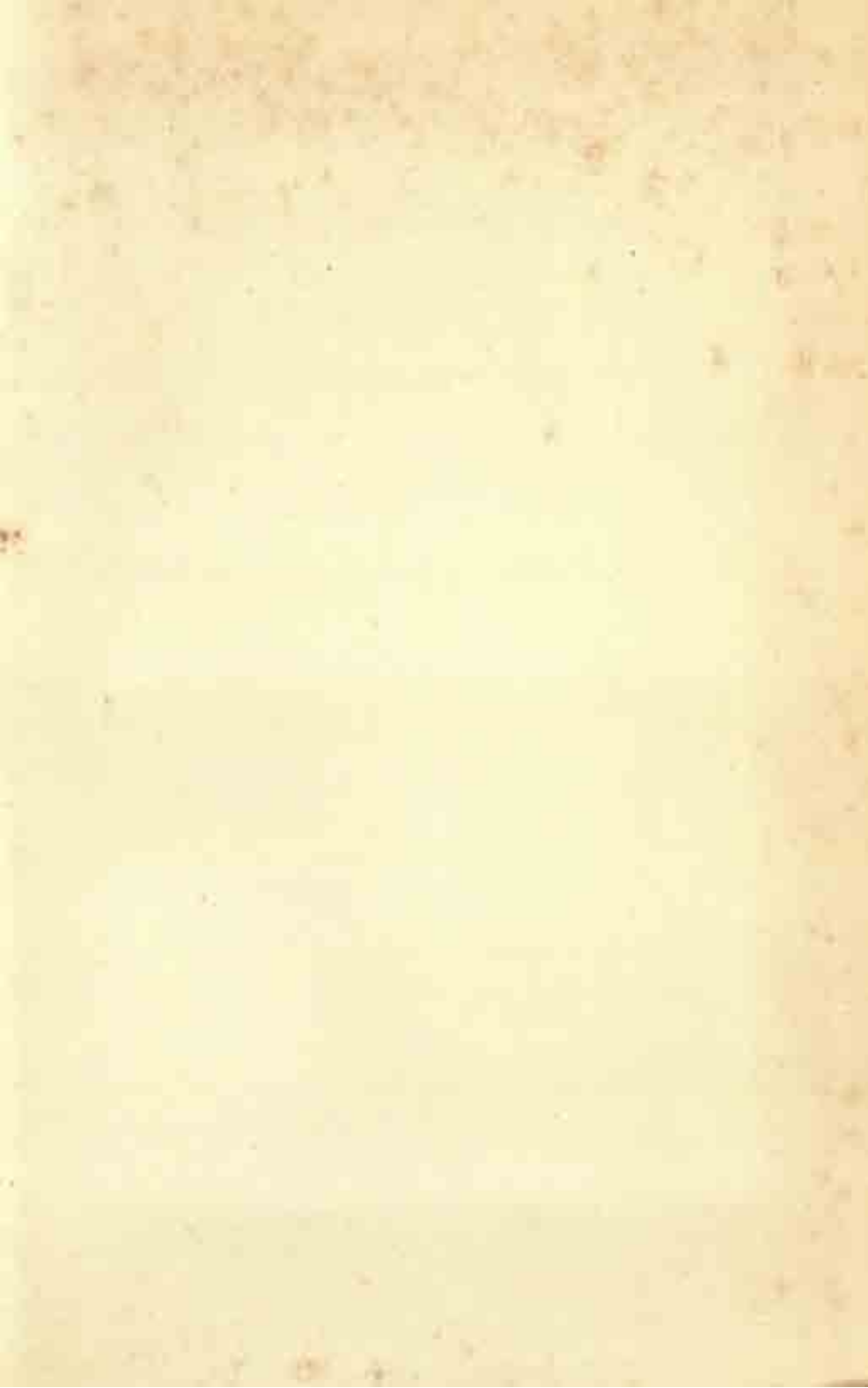
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