

THE PROBLEM OF WOMAN, FROM A BIO-SOCIOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW.

IN a book which will shortly appear before the public, M. Lombroso and I have carefully considered the problem of woman, from a psychological and biological aspect. It is perhaps the first study of the kind which has been made, based on scientific principles, for if woman has been the subject of the highest aspirations, desires, and thoughtful care, she has also been up to the present day scientifically ignored.

This being the first study of the question, it follows that it cannot be entirely free from the defects common to all pioneer efforts of the kind, and above all from the defect of not having given a complete development to the laws and principles set forth in it. Our essay has been preëminently biological and psychological, but the laws of feminine psychology and biology are capable of many sociological applications which have been entirely neglected in the book. In this article, I shall attempt to supply these omissions by setting forth some sociological conclusions belonging to the problem of woman. I shall strive to determine what are, according to our theory, the natural conditions of woman's life.

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The life of all creatures is influenced by certain conditions of environment; if these conditions are wanting, the creature will perish; if these conditions only partially exist the creature will live with difficulty and in a state of suffering, if it be a creature endowed with sensation.

Oxygen is necessary to life in the vegetable and animal world.

If it is wanting, death ensues. If oxygen is present in insufficient quantities, the respiratory and other functions become painful.

This law of correspondence between the living being and its environment, so evident from a biological standpoint, is identically the same from the sociological; only, in the latter case it is more complex, for the life and happiness of the individual should not be a hindrance to the life and happiness of society, nor *vice versa*. This principle might be expressed thus: the individual ought to live under the right conditions, ought to play in society the part best suited to it, to exist in the environment best adapted to it: and this rôle and this environment should both be such as would best profit society at large. In human societies, this double condition of a happy individual and a happy social existence is lacking in a vast number of cases; for the deadly strife of human egotisms and even the painful necessities of life often prevent its growth.

Science, then, should endeavor, by studying the peculiar characteristics of the individual, to find out what is, so to speak, the ideal rôle that the human being ought to play in the progress of civilisation; she should seek the essential conditions required by them for their life and happiness—conditions sometimes destroyed by the exigencies of life, but the realisation of which is the aim and object of progress. All applied sciences which have as their end the practical and useful, such as medicine, pedagogy, psychology, and ethics, labor to search out and discover those natural conditions of life and happiness from a physiological, psychological, and sociological standpoint; in doing this, they trace out an ideal plan of conduct, they offer rules, absolutely true, but which can only be approximately observed. The ever advancing and complete obedience yielded to these rules is the measure of the ascending march of civilisation.

The essential condition of feminine existence, which I desire to analyse in this paper, is that which I shall name the Law of *Non-Labor*. As it is a natural law that the man must labor and struggle to live, so is it a natural law that the woman should neither labor nor struggle for her existence.

Biology clearly shows us, that the physiological prosperity of

species depends on the division of labor between the sexes, for in exact ratio to this is the duration of life. This is the result of natural selection. When the female is not helped and sustained by the male in the struggle for life, it is important, in fact almost necessary, for the species, that the female shall accomplish her work of reproduction with the greatest possible speed and immediately thereafter become extinct. For example, it is evident, that while the female insect is busy laying her eggs, she cannot defend herself from the attacks of enemies nor can she procure for herself the requisite nourishment. If, thus, unassisted by the male, she accomplishes the work of reproduction in the shortest possible space of time, her species will have greater chances of survival, for the shorter the normal duration of life, the fewer the probabilities are that an enemy or any other unfortunate accident will destroy the female before she has fulfilled her duty towards the species.

It is thus that in the lower orders of creation, where the division of labor and mutual aid of the sexes does not exist, the duration of life tends to be reduced to a minimum; for individuals that develop quickly, and quickly die, are more likely to leave descendants than such as do not.

Facts bear out this assertion. Insects among whom this division of labor and association of the sexes is only exceptionally met with, are short lived.* Most diurnal butterflies live but a month, and of nocturnal insects of this class there are several, for example, certain *Psychidæ*, who live only a few days, and some that live only twenty-four hours. The females of *Gryllotalpa* only live a month, those of *Locusta viridissima* only four weeks after maturity; and those of *Lycæna violacea*, according to Edwards, three or four weeks at the longest. As for the parthenogenetic females of *Selenobia triquetrella*, the duration of their lives barely exceeds one day. So it is with many other species of *Selenobia*. The female of *Melolontha vulgaris* does not appear to live longer than forty days. It is also true of the *Ephemeridæ*, so called because they are born, love, and die in a day, "whose flight," says Rössel, in speaking of *Ephemera vulgata*, "begins with the setting sun and terminates before midnight, the moment the dew falls."

Sometimes this brief life is preceded by a very long preëxistence in the larva. Thus, the larva of the cockchafer feeds four years on the roots of trees, before it passes into the beetle stage of its existence. And this state, lived under such restrictions, this complicated body, when it attains complete maturity, has a very fleeting existence. The beetle dies a month after having quitted its chrysalis. Here, therefore, as we perceive, is an immense vital effort, culminating in a very short after-existence, due to the fact that the female not being sustained by the male and being obliged to shield herself from all the dangers of the struggle for existence, must expedite her specific work—the reproduction of her species.

We find, however, among insects one exception, which strongly corroborates our theory. Among bees, wasps, ants, and termites, the females live a long time. Thus, the queen-bee, the only perfect female in the swarm, often lives for two, three, and even five years. With regard to ants, Sir John Lubbock has succeeded in keeping females and workers alive for seven years—a remarkable exception of insect life.

But among these species we have a division of labor, not between the sexes, but between the females and the workers, the latter being neuters, male-females, so to speak. These attend to the nourishment and safety of the queen or perfect female bee, and consequently any great rapidity of reproduction and development is unnecessary. The life of the species is thus prolonged, and its physiological prosperity increased. If we are still in doubt as to whether this prolongation of life is due to a division of labor between the sexes, we have other conclusive evidence of it in the following fact: that the probable ancestors of bees and ants, the *Tenthredo*, who, like the other insects, possess no division of labor, enjoy but a very brief existence.

Up to this point we have spoken only of the short life duration of the female. We will now go a step further and remark that the absence of this division of labor is not only prejudicial to the female, but also to the male, who, in the greater number of cases lives a still shorter life. The males of the singular little parasites of the bee, called *Streptiptera*, live but two or three hours; whilst their

wingless females live about eight days. The latter, therefore, live about sixty-four times as long. The males of *Phylloxera vastatrix* are much shorter-lived than the females. This same phenomenon has also been observed in an order of life still lower than insects. The males of all rotifers possess neither mouth, stomach, nor digestive canal, and, consequently, not being able to feed themselves, must doubtless live a much shorter time than the females, who are furnished with a complete digestive apparatus. The same is true of the males of many crustacea and marine worms.

The explanation of this is easily given. When the male is not the defender of the female, when his existence is merely necessary for the conservation of the species, once this duty is accomplished, a prolongation of his life is of no practical use; whereas the female, having to lay her eggs and often to watch over them until they attain maturity, still retains her usefulness to the species, and must necessarily live a longer space of time. But when the male has to fight the battle of life in defence of the female, her existence being thus prolonged, that of the male, by virtue of the law of natural selection, must also be prolonged, for it is necessary to the preservation of the species that he should live as long as she does, in order to protect her. Thus we have noticed that the workers among bees and ants live as long a time as the queen-bee

It is, thus, division of labor between the sexes that prolongs life in the lower animal world.

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I have described in great detail the relations between the sexes of the lower animal orders, for we can there observe in a clearer and simpler manner the principle which I wish to set forth for the higher, that the prosperity of a species increases, in exact proportion to the degree in which the male frees the female from the burdens and anxieties of life. But this law also exists among the higher orders of animals, although by reason of the complex and innumerable factors which govern the latter's existence its action is here not so easy of analysis.

Among the birds we find marriage, which is a perfected form of the division of labor and mutual coöperation of the sexes. A pair

live together for years, sometimes for life. During their nesting-time the male bird provides food for and defends the female while she hatches her brood. At other seasons, the female helps the male in the search for food, but the guidance of this struggle for life, so to speak, falls always to the lot of the male. The male and female eagle hunt in pairs, but her duties are merely auxiliary. She spies out the victim and announces its presence to her mate. It is owing to this division of labor that birds multiply so fast and are so numerous all over the world, in spite of so many destructive enemies. And among species where this coöperation is less observable, we note a remarkable diminution of number. So, among swallows, if the hatching-time lasts very long, the males often abandon the females, who are forced thus to seek their own food, and this is the occasion in certain years, says Brehm, of a wholesale destruction of their eggs.

The lion and the hyena, during mating-time, hunt only in order to provide food for the female, who remains passive: sometimes the lion, with true chivalry, will not begin his meal until the lioness has satisfied her hunger on the prey he has provided.

In the monogamic and polygamic families of monkeys it is always the male or chief who guides the troop, who watches for the enemy, who opens the march, who advances courageously upon the adversary that threatens his family, while the female climbs the trees. Here, both male and female seek the food, for subsisting as they do, on the fruits and foliage of the forests in which they live, they have only to stretch out their hands to gather without effort their daily food.

Among savages we find that the struggle for life, that is to say, war, falls to the lot of the man; but labor, and that of the most painful kind, is the portion of woman. Woman builds the dwelling or hut; she it is who ploughs the fields, carries the burdens, and among tribes that dwell on the borders of the sea, lakes, or rivers, sometimes rows or fishes. She is the slave, the beast of burden, on whose back is cast the weight of the heaviest and most fatiguing labors. But this is merely a passing phase, a very dangerous aberration, produced by the excessive selfishness of man, which does not

and cannot last long. When M. Letourneau said that the degree of civilisation of a nation could be estimated by the condition of its women, he enunciated a profound truth; but there is yet another and more important side to the question. Those natives among whom this most abnormal and unnatural condition of things still prevails have remained in a savage state and have made scarcely any progress whatever. In fact, many travellers and ethnographers have remarked that among certain savage tribes whose mental endowments were above the average, a very strong obstacle to progress was exactly this excessive labor of the women and the idleness of the men. The men attending only to the duties of the chase and of war, nothing was brought to a state of perfection except the weapons of war; for the women, constrained to plough the earth, to make pottery, etc., neither could nor would work for the amelioration of the products, this not falling into their domain. If labor effects anything in savage woman, it is to increase the maternal sentiment. Obligated as she is, to undertake heavy and arduous labors, and full of love for her offspring, the savage-mother invents an infinity of artifices, whereby she may make her toil lighter and fulfil her duties towards her children. Who has not seen in some ethnological book the picture of a negress, ploughing the fields, while she carries her infant in a kind of sling on her back? We find many such inventions among savages; sometimes we even meet with physiological and morphological modifications—among the Hottentots, for instance. This proves that by relegating to women the work of agriculture and so forth, we do not contribute to the perfection of agriculture or of any industry, but simply to that of the maternal sentiments and what pertains thereto.

It is a more difficult matter to prove that the labor of women among civilised nations is unnatural; for it is so recent a phenomenon that the harmful results which all unnatural conditions of life produce are in its case still difficult to demonstrate. We will observe first, that female labor is not at all necessary for the production of sufficient wealth to supply the wants of humanity—men, women, children, the old, and the sick. Man alone could do this. Woman-labor is not required by the necessity of an increased production. It

only tends to lower the marketable value of male labor ; for, while woman is working in the factories, there are everywhere, and especially in Europe, crowds of men vainly seeking employment, to whom the cessation of work is an oft recurrent and terrible evil. This shows that even from a sociological point of view, female labor is a pathological phenomenon ; for it does not result in the common labor of the two sexes, in itself a bearable evil, but it leads to the enforced idleness of men and the merciless toil of women, entirely overthrowing the relation that nature has established in all orders of life below us.

Perhaps, on physiological grounds alone this principle could be enunciated. Statistics show us an increase of mortality among women and children in countries where industrial life has pressed mothers into its ranks. In Italy, where women are employed in the rivers, the mortality is often startling, particularly so among the children. I do not wish to encumber this article with tables of statistics, so I shall refer the reader to the works of hygienists. But all must know that the life of a factory-hand is the most dreadful imaginable, above all when she has young children. Maternity is a labor of love for women, yet a very exhausting one ; add to this the strain of factory life, the moral anguish of a maternal love which can be satisfied only for a few brief moments each day, and the family cares which press more heavily on a woman on account of her enforced absence from home, and we shall have a sum of suffering and misery sufficient to break down the constitution of the strongest woman.

Another reason why woman should not work is the fact, that we wish her to be to us beautiful and attractive, her whole person, her dress, manners, her ideas and her words filled with exquisite grace. Grace, said Guyau, is the feminine side of life, as strength is the masculine. A perfect woman should be a *chef d'œuvre* of grace and refinement, and to this end she must be exempt from toil. As the human form, and above all the expression of the face, are only the product of the emotions which an individual oftenest experiences, a woman can only be beautiful and graceful in person in so far as the greater proportion of her emotional experiences are sweet, tender, and peaceful. This is a theory that Mr. Bain has developed

with great fulness and clearness. But the emotions which toil entails, in the struggle for life, are violent and strong; anger, hatred, enthusiasm, boldness, courage, these may impart strength and grandeur to the individual, but they can never endow her with the attractiveness of grace. The workingwoman grows ugly and loses her feminine characteristics, she loses what is most exquisite and æsthetic in woman.

I foresee here many objections. It is man, you say, who desires grace in woman; it is but another proof of masculine egotism, thus to foster idleness in woman, in order that she may become that which he specially desires; do not let us dignify as a natural law, what is but the outcome of masculine psychical tastes and habits.

I believe this to be a mistake; grace, in woman, is not merely the product of caprice and selfishness in the man who chooses the prettiest woman because she touches his sense of the beautiful. Grace plays a far higher rôle in the social and psychical evolution of humanity, it is an ever active and moral force, always beneficent, the fruits of which are far greater, than could be produced by any labor by woman. Womanly grace and the love which men bear a beautiful woman, have perhaps been the origin of paternal love and of all the other sweet and tender feelings of which the male is capable.

Grace is the æsthetic side of weakness, and since man seeks this quality in woman, it follows by the well known psychological law of association, that the perception of grace and the sweet emotions of love become more closely connected the more psychical progress increases. Once this combination is fairly established, all graceful and pretty things, by reason of this law, awaken the emotion of love, feebly, yet in a sufficient degree that all pretty things, be they human beings, natural objects, or artistic productions—give us pleasure; and this pleasure is only in a lesser degree a reproduction of the pleasures of love. But grace, as we have just said, is the æsthetic side of weakness. Hence, the association between the emotions of love and the perception of grace, becomes stronger, it extends itself from graceful things to weak things, for at certain times, almost all weak things present themselves to us under the

æsthetic aspect of grace ; so that as the association between these two sensations widens, it becomes an association between love and weakness. Weaker creatures, for example, young children, who are *par excellence*, the weakest of all beings, awaken in us a profound sympathy, which is but a rush-light in comparison with the intensity of the flame of sympathy which unites us to woman. We find then that physical grace in woman is a beneficent sunshine, calling into bloom the softer emotions of man. It would be a great misfortune were this sunshine to be overclouded.

It may here be objected that if woman be prevented from taking a share in the struggle for daily existence she will be destined to remain forevermore the slave of the sterner sex, and will not benefit by the fruits of that civilisation which has been more particularly the result of man's work. This is not so. The truth of the statement, that toil is not woman's natural condition, is proved by the fact that she does actually now reap the very benefits, in the production of which she has not coöperated. If she attains that supreme end, the bettering of her condition, without having to labor for it, it is unnatural to suppose she should spend her substance, physical and mental, in laboring for what she may gain without any effort on her part.

We hear a great deal about the slavery of woman ; that she is always the victim of a despotic master, who makes her submissive and obedient to his will. These statements are but so many exaggerations, true only in the remote and barbarous ages of humanity. Woman, more than man, enjoys all the benefits of civilisation, which nevertheless have been in great part acquired by him alone.

Glance for a moment at the condition of woman as it used to be among savage tribes and among the barbarous ancestors of civilised nations ; compare it with her condition now in the highest centres of the world. What an advance ! What a marvellous transformation ! Among savage tribes woman works harder than the beast, performs the most sordid drudgery, she is ill-fed, relegated to the most uncomfortable and ugliest parts of the dwelling, is beaten, roughly treated, killed, and even eaten, according to the whim of

her master. She is in very deed a slave, having neither the right to live, nor to be happy.

Among civilised nations, though we do not deny that she is still the victim of certain oppressions and injustices, yet woman is not obliged to toil, except in those countries where large manufacturing interests have produced a transitory regression among the working classes. She is respected and ardently beloved by man, who often works with dogged resolution to win a wife and the supreme joys of family affection ; she finds in man a protector, who is glad to procure for her æsthetic enjoyments, elegance in her person and surroundings, mental gratifications and rural pleasures, making her life sweeter and brighter, more charming and happier. Of course, all these luxuries with which man surrounds woman are to be found to-day only among the wealthier classes. But if the poorer classes are not able to do as much, it is merely from inability, and not from want of will ; for it is the height of ambition in every normal man to better the condition of his wife and children, to spare them fatigue and suffering, and the daily scars that are gained in the deadly struggle for life. Though despotic husbands still exist, it does not prevent woman from being in very many cases the little queen of a more or less extended empire, surrounded by homage, veneration, and love.

Now, can it be said that man's condition has improved as much as woman's? I think the reader, if he will consider it for a moment, will answer this question, which no one yet has thought of asking, in the negative. Once woman had to toil like the beast of the field ; she was a victim at the mercy of a tyrant master : to-day she is exempt from labor just as soon as the financial condition of the family allows of it. She is generally surrounded by care and affection. Man labors and toils to-day, just as he did of old, and there is nothing abnormal in this fact, for it is his positive duty. But the progress of civilisation should at least have rendered his labors lighter and easier, and he should have earned a certain amount of leisure, which he might devote to superior and intellectual work, such as would ennoble and elevate him. Can we say that either mechanics or science has yet accomplished this miracle? To-day, in all classes of

society, man has to work more energetically than ever before ; the struggle for existence has become fiercer ; the effort he has to make in order to conquer, or, at least, not be conquered, in the race, is infinitely greater than that which sufficed a hundred years ago. We see this every day more and more, by the ever-increasing numbers of the defeated, suicides and lunatics, and by the maimed and wounded, those broken down in body and mind, nervous patients, etc., etc. Truly woman is happier in her present state than she was in her past, while man is preparing for himself innumerable other sufferings, the elements perhaps of some overwhelming future.

If, therefore, the natural outcome of facts proves that woman, though working in a far lesser degree than man, still benefits more than he from the effects of civilisation, this should alone suffice to demonstrate the unreasonableness of labor. Nature's great aim is the economy of forces. How absurd it is, then, that a human being should expend painful energy in attaining a certain point, when he can get to precisely the same point without any expenditure of labor at all.

This curious phenomenon, which up to the present day has neither been noticed nor analysed, proves that political questions are not of the slightest value to women. I cannot understand why the question of woman suffrage should so excite public opinion. It is entirely profitless to her ; it is a weapon for which she has not the least need. At the outset of civilisation the political organisation was but a superstructure of the military organisation. As Mr. Spencer has so aptly shown, the chief or head was at once military, judicial, and political. His generals were his ministers as well as his judges ; the political and judicial council, when it existed, was composed of warriors. The duty of government was to increase the military strength. It is evident that in this period of social evolution, woman, who is not in any way concerned with the defence of the nation, had no political interests to defend. State affairs did not concern her, or at least very indirectly, for politics are mainly connected with the means of conquest and defence. To-day, in this half-mercantile community, politics are an adjunct of finance and political economy, in which the antagonistic interests of the

various classes thrive together ; here, women have little or no interest. Does the wife of a manufacturer have much interest in the election of delegates, or in defending the interests of the class to which her husband belongs? If her husband strains every nerve already to provide her with all the luxuries of life, he will certainly not be lax in defending those interests which are identical with those of his family.

We could more easily understand the necessity for woman suffrage, if the sex had particular rights of their own to uphold, if women were a separate class ; but as the rights of every woman are riveted, so to speak, to those of her family, and as those interests are already protected by men, there is no sense in involving women in these bitter and fierce polemics, where so much good blood is spilled ; they, who should lead a sweet and calm existence.

But, it is said, women do have their own particular and separate rights, rights which the excessive egotism of men—the law-makers—entirely neglect. The legislators, themselves elected by men, frame laws with reference simply to their own advantage. We hold that it is mere delusion to say that woman's social conditions are dependent solely upon the laws ; they are the outcome of the habits and customs of nations, of which laws are merely the ratification. No matter how excellent a law may be, it goes for naught, if it is in direct contradiction to the habits and customs of a country.

Let us suppose, for instance, that among a savage tribe, where women are treated like slaves, a great-hearted and wise king should promulgate a decree, commanding an equality of sex ; do you suppose it would alter the existing state of affairs? In no wise. It would remain null and void ; it would have no more effect, than an edict commanding the cessation of a storm would have, upon the atmosphere.

But I have already pointed out, when a nation progresses in civilisation, its habits and customs react quickly and favorably on women ; and man himself ameliorates the conditions of his companion, endows her with all the benefits which have accrued therefrom, without her having to put forth any exertion. What advantage, then, can be gained by participating in man's struggle for ex-

istence, when woman has only to wait until he places these benefits at her feet?

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Gifted women of genius, possessing unusual intellectual qualities, have the right to labor like men. It is both a cruel and absurd prejudice which would deny the right to such a one, of crowning her noble efforts with glory, simply because she is a woman. But our laws like all other laws, are framed for the guidance of the ordinary, normal woman, in whose case labor is as much of an absurdity, as in the case of the ordinary, normal man it is a positive duty.

All toil is painful ; civilisation is a heroic effort on the part of man to free himself from this yoke, or at least to make its weight lighter. It is a natural law, that mankind should strive to attain his ends by means which involve the least possible expenditure of energy. Is it not, then, in direct violation of this to say, that a being who can attain happiness without labor and enjoy a pleasanter social existence, should wear herself out in a life of unremitting toil which works injury to herself, to those around her, and to the whole social economy at large?

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