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## Evolution of Women

There are few thinkers today, if indeed there are any, who do not accept in whole or in part, the theory of evolution. Many may deny the claim that there was never a special creation of man and many more may hold grave doubts as to the exact relationship of the modern statesman pleading for justice and human rights, and the anthropoid ape chattering among the branches of his native forest. But no one who is thoroughly familiar with the history of mankind will deny for a moment that there has been an evolution of human society. Not only do the written records of human affairs prove it, but the myriads of implements, weapons, and crude productions of long extinct tribes, the hieroglyphics [sic] written on bits of papyrus, bark and stones, and found in mounds and caves and burial places have all added convincing testimony to the great myth [sic] of evolution.

From the most barbaric beginnings possible to conceive from the time when men did not possess a language, or a vestige of humanity, the centuries have witnessed an evolution onward and upward, step by step to our own modern civilization. It has been a growth of wealth and power and material comfort, a growth of commerce, arts, science, intelligence and all the things which pertain to modern life. But to those of us, who love liberty, the best of all this evolution has been the growth of respect for human rights.

It has been said by more than one great thinker that the best criterion by which to judge of the status of a nation is the esteem in which it holds its women. Certain it is there is no better way to trace the evolution of society than through the evolution of women.

Evolution is at best a cold and unsympathetic presentation of facts, and no woman can read the evolution of her sex without many a heartache and many a query why women were called to suffer this martyrdom.

In the earliest tribes there was no such thing as marriage. Men herded together like wild beasts. Men had but few rights and women had none. Whenever a man fancied any particular woman, he simply seized her and held her as his own. If another man fancied her too, there was a fight between the two and the victor carried off the woman in exactly the manner adopted by the lion the King of Beasts in his lovemaking. The lioness sits casually by while any two of her suitors fight the case to a conclusion

and then trots off contentedly with the best one. The man kept the woman he had captured as long as she pleased him. She obeyed him and was his slave. Knowing no wish save his desire. Women were the first property men possessed. When a man tired of a wife he turned her away, when like a wild beast, she wandered about free until some other man caught and enslaved her. When women were plentiful, a man had as many wives as he could capture and hold. Women were not recognized as rational beings who might have desires of their own, and although a woman might easily be the wife of a hundred men in her lifetime, she was never consulted.

When society became sufficiently developed to keep herd of cattle and sheep, the women were made herders and in addition performed the household duties of gathering the food and preparing the meals. It was considered beneath the dignity of the men in most tribes to labor. War and hunting was their business. Wars might be infrequent and even hunting might be indulged in but rarely, yet the men never labored. On long journeys, the women carried all the burdens, while the men walked free and easy, loaded only with a hunting knife. Even on hunting trips, women were taken along to carry the loads, cook the meals, build the fires, prepare the camp and when an animal was killed, it was the women who butchered and carried it on their backs to camp. Not a man would condescend to touch it. The excuse given, for there was an excuse, was the men were so exhausted by the chase.

War was an important phase of life. Without fighters no tribe could live. It was a constant struggle for the survival of the strongest. Warriors were in great demand and every woman was compelled to bear as many children as possible. If one was found to be incompetent to become a mother, she was turned into the wilderness to starve. In many tribes it was difficult to secure food enough for all and as a matter of economy, most female infants were drowned. It cost much valuable food to raise girls to the age when they could produce warriors, and it was easier as well as cheaper to steal wives from neighboring tribes. It was a stroke of diplomacy well worthy of a better cause.

The methods of capturing wives were various. Sometimes a maiden was caught wandering alone in the forest and was carried off by some prowling warrior of a neighboring tribe. Sometimes a sudden attack was made upon a village and when the warriors had been attracted away from the camp, a detachment descended upon it and carried off the women. The usual method however was to secure the women of tribes defeated in battle. For thousands of years it was the custom and the law of war among all tribes and nations that all property belonging to the vanquished, must by right come into the possession of the conqueror. Women were property. Usually the old women were left to starve, the men were either enslaved, killed or held as hostages of war, but

the young women were without exception in all barbarous tribes kept for “breeding purposes.” It was a rough way to express it, but it was a rough destiny. If the vanquished tribe wished to exchange prisoners of war for these women, it could be done, but so rarely did they appreciate justice in those days, the conquerors retained the women until their children had been born. Otherwise the ranks of the enemy would be increased by its conquerors, which would be a false principle of economics.

In semi-civilization, captured women were merely enslaved and sold from the auction block to the highest bidder. Soldiers who had performed some special deed of daring often received presents of a number of women captives to do with them whatever they liked. Women slaves might have husbands who lived with them, but they were nevertheless expected at any time to submit themselves to their owners. Many examples of this condition is [sic] recorded in the Bible. One, in 31<sup>st</sup> chapter of Numbers, tells of a victory of the Israelites over the Midianites. After the battle many thousands of sheep, cattle, asses and women were divided among the soldiers and the people at home. The women who were married were killed, but the virgins, 16,000 innocent helpless girls were led forth and divided among the soldiers as a part of their legitimate pay for services. In Deuteronomy 20 chapter, we learn that “women, cattle and all that is in the city even all the spoil thereof shalt thou (the victors) take to thyself.” In Genesis 19<sup>th</sup> chapter we may gain a clear idea of the total absence of regard for the rights or welfare of women. Two men had taken refuge in the house where Lot lived. In the night men came to the door and demanded that the men be delivered to them. Lot felt that he must protect his guests and begged them to go away. When he found they would not do this he said, “Behold now, I have two daughters who have never known a man, let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you and do you to them as is good in your eyes; only with these men do nothing.” Lot was willing to give the purity and the lives of his own daughters to save the life of strangers.

The woman question had never been heard of in those days and whatever law in any nation applied to a man’s ox applied equally to his wife. Women were property to be sold by fathers, bought by husbands and resold when they wished. A man had absolute ownership in his wife and compelled her to labor when he liked. When the ox, or the wife were stubborn and refused to work, he could beat them and if they tried his patience too much he could kill either of them by any method he pleased. It was held in all tribes that a man had as much right to take the life of his wife as of his ox. Did she not belong to him? Neither the ox, nor the woman had rights of its own. He could sell either one, or give them away. As a good man would lend his ox to a friend, so it was the custom everywhere for men to lend the use of their wives to any friends who might visit them. It was the pride of many chiefs to supply a different wife for each night of the

visit, however long it might be prolonged. The guests were allowed the choice of the wives of the village. This was a necessary part of hospitality even though some of the dear, unselfish hosts had no wives left for themselves. Of course, the wives were never consulted. What business was it of theirs?

When a man died his property, and that always included his wives, descended to his sons, if he had any; if not, it went to his brothers or nearest male relatives. If the law gave the property to the oldest son only, he inherited all the wives except his own mother, who went to some son by a different mother. It was, however, the custom in many tribes for sons not only to inherit their own mothers but to bear children by them. This was usually done in the family of the chief in order to keep the blood pure and thoroughly aristocratic. To further the same end, chiefs often married their own daughters as fast as they were old enough.

One of the curious exceptions to the polygamy so generally practiced was polyandry or the custom of one woman having several husbands. It is supposed to have been very general in certain sections and is quite prevalent today among savage tribes. Many [sic] authorities are led to believe from various customs and habits that the Israelites had been polyandrous before we have any record of them. It was a custom which came about quite naturally when food was scarce and was difficult to obtain to supply all members of the tribe, female infants were disposed of, in order to devote all the sustenance and care to the raising of warriors. They expected victory in war to supply them with wives. But when the young men were old enough to wife, there were no victories, hence no wives. Of course each man must be supplied with a wife in some way, so the plan of several men taking one wife was adopted. Usually, it was arranged that the brothers of one family had a common wife. If there were not brothers enough to make up the required number, a few cousins were allowed to come into the concern. If one of the number died, the share of the wife which was widowed descended to the others. If the wife died, and there was no available woman to take her place other husbands had to allow these men the partnership which owned their wives for no man must be left in a condition of widowerhood. If by any chance all the husbands died and there were no male relatives to inherit the wife, a new set of husbands was speedily provided for her. However, it may be said, they always forgot to inquire of the woman which men she would prefer for husbands, or how many would constitute an agreeable number. It was said this community wife had some privileges and liberties the polygamous wife did not have. She was more of a companion, and her numerous husbands could usually among them provide the necessary food, but her lot was still far from being enviable. She cooked the food, cared for the children, waited upon her husbands and gratified their every whim. Travellers [sic] tell us that the

possession of many husbands brings a modification of some of the brutalities heaped upon women, since one husband will defend the wife against other husbands, yet after all, it only means that many more masters and an increase of toil and suffering.

Under this institution no one knew who his father was and relationship was only traced through the mother. The descent of property, names and tribal headship came through the mother's side. Even the chief could not be sure who his sons were, or if he had any at all.

All society was either polyandrous or polygamous. If in any tribe men had one wife apiece it was a mere accident and only indicated that they had not been able to secure or to support more.

While it was the custom in most nations to buy wives from the father, yet in those locations where women were very plentiful and yet where the difficulty of obtaining food was such as to render it a burden to a man to keep many wives it became the custom for the father to provide a dowry for his daughter and by means of it to purchase a husband for her. In many tribes and nations there was little chance of any girl finding a husband unless she had a dowry. This was often difficult to secure and fathers sent their daughters abroad at an early age to earn their portion by prostitution. This was considered no disgrace and in fact was so well approved that wives were frequently purchased or captured in order to reap the benefit of their earnings. In many tribes sufficiently developed to have a marriage ceremony women were often married for only two or three days in the week and the rest of the time they were free to cohabit with other men. This was considered a convenient arrangement as there were wives enough so the husbands did not suffer neglect and the earnings were all his.

In all tribes there was divorce, with or without cause, for husbands—never for wives. The husband was free at any time to kill his wife, sell her, give her away or turn her out of doors. If he envied another man's wife he could steal her but justice demanded that at his own expense he must provide another wife for the man who had been robbed. Under the Mosaic law, divorce was a privilege for husbands only. The Patagonians pawn their wives, or sell them outright, to the Spaniards for brandy.

Perhaps the whole condition of women in the early centuries can be told no more exactly than by quoting this paragraph from Herbert Spencer:

“The only limit to the brutality women are subjected to by men of the lowest races is the inability to live and propagate under greater [sic]. Clearly, ill usage, underfeeding

and overworking, may be pushed to an extent which, if not immediately fatal to the women, incapacitates them for rearing children enough to maintain the population and disappearance of the society follows. But short of this there seems to have been no check to the tyranny which the stronger sex exercises over the weaker. Stolen from another tribe, and perhaps made insensible by a blow that she may not resist; not simply beaten, but speared about the limbs, when she displeases her savage owner; forced to do all the drudgery and bear all the burdens, while she has to care for and carry about her children; and feeding on what is left after the man has done; the woman's sufferings are carried as far as can be consistent [sic] with the survival of herself and her offspring."

Let it be understood, these customs are not those of a few peoples of little significance; they were the customs everywhere, in every race, nation and tribe. It was the universal destiny of women to be the slave of man.

It was an advance step when the women belonging to a man were classified into wives and concubines as in Solomon's tribe. The wives having gone through a marriage ceremony while the concubines were merely possessed. They might both be bought or captured, though the wives were more often obtained by contract with the father and were usually women of rank. The children of the wives were legitimate and could inherit the father's property. The children of the concubines were called "natural" and could not inherit. Other children by women who were neither wives nor concubines of the father were bastards and were not counted.

Another advance step was that which made the first wife a chief wife and where she was the wife of the King made her the Queen. It did not give her any power, but she was more a companion for her husband than any other wives had been. Vashti and Esther are examples of this condition. Many Egyptian paintings represent the King and Queen sitting upon a throne with all the wives and concubines dancing for their amusement, a distinction between the two being clearly defined.

After this came the one wife system or monogamy. Let no woman suppose this advance resulted from an increased respect for women or a loftier sentiment. There is not a fact in all history to substantiate such a theory. It was by the kind hand of poverty, women found themselves led into the condition of monogamy. When society had been sufficiently developed and life had become sufficiently complicated to bring about a division of labor, which gave to the men the outdoors pursuits and to women the household duties, it was not an easy task always to support two wives and men found themselves compelled through economy to possess but one wife. Wealthy men might

yet have several wives, but naturally poor men objected to their neighbors having more wives than themselves and gradually monogamy came to be a part of the organic law of nation of the most advanced civilization. Men, however, virtually disobeyed it by taking to themselves as many mistresses as they wished as well as having access to all their female slaves, for slavery was everywhere present.

The first record we have, so far as I know, of any suggestion that women were rational beings and consequently might have rights was some 500 B.C. when Solon in Greece forbade a man to sell his daughter or his sister into slavery. He likewise issued an edict which punished violations of the persons of free women. So far as I know, there never was any law in any nation which forbade the violation of the virtue of a slave woman. Solon was the originator of the "Woman's Rights" agitation.

Under the influence of these more beneficent laws and the encouragement of respect, women blossomed forth into scholars, musicians and orators whose words of wisdom were heeded and valued by wise men. Not infrequently they gave public lectures on Rhetoric and Philosophy and were regarded for the first time in history in some degree of equality. The name of Aspasia will live as long as that of Socrates while the familiar title of the 10<sup>th</sup> muse which Plato gave to Sappho will cling to her as long as records of human affairs live. But Greece fell and with it was buried those manificent [sic] liberties for women and degradation was her lot once more.

When Christ was born, the Roman Empire led all other nations in the advancement of its civilization and it was within its domain He first drew the breath of this life. Here women were treated as companions by their husbands. They ate with them, walked and talked with them and were permitted to learn to read and to have opinions of their own and occasionally they exerted a pronounced influence over men. Mankind was sufficiently developed by this time to have experienced the emotion of love, a sentiment said to be wholly lacking in earlier races. Through men's tenderness of feeling, the position of many women was far from unpleasant and many lived and died happy lives. So long as the wife could bask in the sunlight of her husband's affection, all went well, but alas! for the woman whose husband had tired of her. He could easily trump up a charge of drunkenness or adultery against her and for either of these she could be put to death although her good husband might regale in Bacchanalian pleasures to his heart's content or indulge in all the adultery he found convenient and no law said him nay. Every man held a little to his wife exactly as he would to a piece of land which told where he got her, and how. If this title was questioned he had but to go into the courts, exactly as he would do if it were land, and prove he had possession of her for a year, and the title was established. In all law

women stood in the same relation to their husbands as their children. When a woman married she became the daughter of her husband and the sister of her future children. However much a man might love and trust his wife or daughter, at his death he was permitted to leave them only 100 sesterces [ancient Roman coin] an amount exactly equal to \$4 of our money. This fabulous sum they could spend just as they liked. Their keeping was provided for by placing the property in the hands of a guardian who purchased all her clothes, food and necessities as best pleased his judgment. If she wanted a skein of silk to hem her tunic or to hire a donkey for a ride she must ask him to do these things for her and however urgent the necessity she might be refused. A woman was a relict of her husband in good earnest in those days. However, a little later things changed greatly. Women could inherit or acquire property, sell and will it away. They were encouraged to education and according to [Henry Thomas] Buckle possessed more personal rights and proprietary privileges than at any other time until the present period.

While Christianity eventually bettered the condition of women, its immediate effect was detrimental. Owing to the ignorance of the people and their long familiarity with the idea of the subjection of women, it was but natural they should have interpreted the Mosaic law and the teachings of Paul and Peter to have meant a more restricted surveillance of women. Under Pagan Rome, women frequently recited poetry of their own composition in public and had contributed not a little to the literature of the day. But under the early [sic] Ch. [Christian] teaching they were not permitted to appear in public places and their names were found no more in literature. For centuries after, the laws remained practically the same, but their freedom was even more restricted. There came that long period when both men and women were plunged into the sorrows of war and famine and pestilence and chaos reigned everywhere supreme. No order, no law, no stability anywhere. It was a time when men enjoyed little liberty and women knew none. Bought and sold, bearing children whose fathers had been their savagers, serving in humility, lustful, harsh, brutal husbands, their condition alone was such might well have given this period its title of the Dark Ages. It was the understanding of all these miseries of women which prompted Martin Luther to say when he was trying to comfort his wife grieving piteously over the loss of their first daughter: "O Margaret don't grieve, thou knowest what a hard world this is for girls."

Then came Feudalism and held its sway for centuries more. It was an institution iniquitous for men but it was simply damnable for women. A young girl born in those massive grand romantic old castles knew little joy. She lived her life in terror lest some other Feudal lord should beset her castle and win the victory in their constant wars. Too well she knew if that should happen, her poor defenseless body would be handed over

to the remorseless cruel soldiers to be savaged and assaulted in a manner so brutal and horrible, but few historians have dared to recite its details. Then perchance she loved some brave young cavalier and was betrothed to him. With fresh young love stirring in her veins, the sweet hours of her courtship were darkened by the horror of her first week of married life for every wife must spend her first nights, not with her new made husband, but with the lord of the castle. When the marriage was over, as she felt the life of her first child within her a new terror came. Well she knew the fate of the pregnant woman, if her castle should be defeated in battle. Without the trouble of first taking the life of the women, she had heard how the addoman [abdomen] would be ripped open with the cruel poniard and the newborn babe carried forth on point of spear amid the jist [sic] and jeers of those inhuman soldiers. It was so, women lived and loved and suffered and died.

With the introduction of witchcraft into the religion of Europe, women found a new enemy. It was held by the church that it was a direct insult to the Almighty to let a witch escape and everybody was on a hunt to ferret them out. A curious thing it is that most of those found were women. It is probably the natural outcome of the persistent teaching of the clergy that women were only placed here as temptations to man, that they were the door of hell and totally unclean. While the Pilgrims were landing on Plymouth Rock, the persecution of the witches was at its height in Europe and the smell of the burning flesh of defenseless women pervaded the whole continent of Europe. There is many a record of hundreds of them burned at one time. But the agony of this fate was not the lot of the condemned alone, but was shared by every other women for the eye of suspicion rested upon them all.

The church can scarcely be called a protector of women during these middle ages. Although it was in a position to protect them had it so desired for the church dictated the laws of most governments. It was not until the tenth century that a woman had a right to reject a husband selected for her and it was in the same century according to W. Lecky [William Edward Hartpole Lecky] that a Christian woman acquired the privileges of eating at the same table with her husband. Wives were bought in England as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century according to Spencer and were everywhere publicly whipped upon the complaint of their husbands, sometimes stripped naked for the purpose. Spencer says as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century gentlemen of the aristocracy arranged pleasure parties to see wretched women publicly whipped at Bridewell. All through the early centuries the church taught that every woman must do penance after the birth of a child, usually by means of "sackcloth and ashes," to overcome her uncleanliness, although a husband invariably received congratulations over the advent of the heir. In other words, motherhood was a disgrace while

fatherhood was an honor. The priesthood was very corrupt, and while taking vows of celibacy, there were few who did not possess mistresses and thousands of women were allured to this ruin because of their belief in the infallibility of the church. The priests were everywhere declaring women to be the mothers of all iniquity and pronouncing them creatures of shame, and at the same time were doing all in their power to make their words true. One Bishop in Spain boasted of having 70 mistresses, evidently a large number, since it was made a matter of record. Another Bishop in Germany was deposed because he had 14 children born in one year—the number being considered unseemly in a Bishop. It is stated by [John William] Draper that 100,000 women in England alone were made dissolute by the clergy. Women were held for centuries to be too unclean to take the eucharist in their naked hands and when under arrest were everywhere denied “benefit of clergy.” A petty larceny which would have given a man a few days imprisonment invariably beheaded a woman. A crime for which a man would have been hanged burned a woman alive. Everywhere the church used its influence to prevent women from learning to read. In the fourth century according to [Eliza Burt] Gamble, there was a great council where was gravely argued the question: “Ought women to be human beings.” The pope at the head of the church at last concluded “The female sex is not a fault in itself but a fact for which women themselves are not to blame” and he also expressed the opinion, although others differed with him, that women would be permitted to rise, like men, at the resurrection. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century another Council argued the question: “Would it be consistent with the duties and uses of women for them to learn the alphabet?”

When the Americans were fighting the war of independence in 1776, England represented the most advanced civilization and the condition of women there was better than in any other nation. They were permitted to write and have their books published, although they were never encouraged to do so. They could be educated if their fathers thought best to employ tutors for them, which it may be said they rarely did. It was thought sufficient if a woman knew how to read and write her own name legibly. Figures and Geography were unnecessary accomplishments and the woman who ventured to learn more arithmetic than was comprised in the multiplication table was shunned by men as strong minded and her father found it so difficult to find her a husband, the practice was exceedingly unpopular. Of course women themselves did not care to be educated when it was accompanied by such dire results. There were no schools open to women. They could not speak or read in public and no woman had ever prayed or given her experience, much less voted in any church meeting except the Quakers, and perhaps Methodist church, although our own Ann Hutchinson was an exception. No woman ever went into a public library to read. She could not make a will or own property if she were a married woman. She could work but her earnings

belonged to her husband and there were but three occupations open to her, household service, sewing and prostitution. Her clothes, her wedding ring, even the presents given her by friends belonged to her husband. She had not the slightest claim in law to the children she had gone down into the "valley and shadows of death to bring into the world." Every man could beat his wife if she disobeyed him, for did she not promise to obey him in the marriage ceremony? But the wise just courts of England had modified the wife's punishment to such an extent that no man could whip his wife with a stick which would measure larger than the judge's thumb—a stick quite long enough it would seem to enforce discipline satisfactorily. Our own august judges repeated the decision in this country, declaring that that [sic] a man did have a perfect right to whip his wife provided the stick with which he did it came within these requirements. While the fashion of selling wives had somewhat gone out of date, yet while young America was fighting in defense of its principle that life, liberty and pursuit of happiness were inalienable rights which belonged to every individual alike, more than one wife was being led to the auction block in England by a halter her points examined, and sold to the highest bidder. She was always sold in the horse market where she was classified among the goods on sale as a mare.

This is in brief the general history of women up to the beginning of the present century. They tell us women were too ignorant, too weak, too inferior to have made much of an impression upon those centuries and that in all those years the sex failed to produce a genius. But what brain could have developed genius when denied the culture of the slightest education and what mouth could utter words of wisdom when the law constantly placed a gag in it? Says Gamble: "It is probable that a more correct understanding of the laws of life and heredity will establish the fact that because of the subjection of women the entire race has been mentally dwarfed and physically weakened." Certain it is that by the denial of equal privileges for men and women, the world has forever lost a valuable source of contributions to literature and philosophy and science. Had it been possible for the advices of women when been [sic] heeded, with their well known love of peace, home and compromise no one can doubt that the savagery and tyranny and bloodshed that disgrace the history of mankind would have been at least mitigated and the history more human.

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