

The Great Lesson Women Must Learn from the War

Madame de Saint-Point, the Gifted Parisian Poetess and Social Leader, Says Women Must Abandon Their Silly and Unhealthy Clothes and Devote Themselves to Maternity



The Corso
by
Rodin.

By Valentine de Saint-Point,
The Parisian Poetess and Grandniece of the
Great Lamartine.

THE war has come, terrible, insatiable, involving, one after the other, nearly all the great nations. Even from neutral countries innumerable volunteers have flocked to place themselves among the combatants. Thus all nations, belligerent or neutral, are affected by the great war.

This terrible conflict, the most thoughtful person of past centuries would never have imagined, is a veritable carnage. Every day, every hour, of this war lays low a magnificent crop of European youth.

It is, indeed, the young that are most exposed to slaughter and most often destroyed. This unparalleled war will make a red harvest of all our youth in arms. It is the hecatomb of the elite of several races. The flower of the nations will be cut off before having produced any fruit.

At this moment the fighting nations have their eyes fixed upon the field of battle. They think only of the enemy who is armed with shells and bullets. They forget internal enemies, enemies who do not destroy with great sound and violence like the cannon, but who nevertheless destroy the race of the old and the young civilized peoples of Europe and America—the Occidental race.

Among these insidious and silent enemies we must put in the first place habits and costumes that have hindered the propagation of the race.

For centuries, by means of improper corsets, tight shoes and other foolish fashions, the body of civilized woman has been deformed, spoiled, martyred. These fashions are not only a crime against art, they are a social crime. And this crime is made still more odious by the outbreak of war, because it interferes with maternity and contributes to depopulation in a very large degree.

Woman Must Do Her Duty Like the Soldier.

The natural mission of woman has always been the continuation of the race. For a long time, in centres of civilization, in our cities, woman has been failing more and more in her sacred mission. In the modern life of cities large families are a burden and life is difficult for them. The woman who desired maternity was becoming rare for that reason. But foolish fashions and social customs have insidiously checked maternity even among those who did not wish to avoid it. They not only led many women to sterility but also transformed healthy and normal maternity into a long and painful illness with lasting consequences.

This torture naturally had no attraction for women. They needed true heroism to be willing to run such great risks. In the entire Occident large families were thus becoming more and more rare. For many years statisticians in all countries had sounded a cry of alarm, but very few women troubled themselves about it. It was a mistake on their part, a serious mistake, but only a mistake, for the disastrous future was still far away.

But the war came, and then it was seen that what had been before the war simply an error would become to-morrow a crime.

When men are fighting on the battlefield or in the economic world to re-establish peace, industry and harmony in the world, women must accept maternity as a sacred duty. They must become the willing conscripts of maternity.

Many women think that they have fulfilled their duty when they have helped to nurse the wounded or to clothe the fighting men. Those things are very well, but they are very little. They are but play compared to the veritable mission which nature has confided to them. In place of the fatal tithe of blood, which the men of all nations are paying, woman owes children to the country. Women must realize that all the dead men must live again and that it belongs to them to create that which the ancestral hate of the nations destroys every day. They must create new generations for the labors of peace.

The mission of creating is so magnificent that a woman should forget the burdens of it. The mother who conceives a child creates the

future from the past. As for the sufferings inseparable from maternity, women will reduce them in proportion as they suppress the horrible customs which destroy their health and cause them pain, entirely against nature. There is no physical joy like that of successful maternity.

Thanks to abominable and unnatural clothes, we have lost a precise knowledge of the female body as nature intended it to be. Since the fourteenth century, the period when fashions began to be ugly and degrading, improper corsets and unhealthy contrivances have over and over again changed the female figure according to the whim of the moment in size, posture and nearly every other respect. Every time that the stupid and ridiculous fashion of the small waist has prevailed the corset has been a true instrument of torture. To display it women have shown as much heroism as the soldier in the trenches, but it was a sadly misplaced heroism.

Woman has become, through her slavery to fashion, the worst enemy of the human race. Instead of beautifying her body she makes it ugly. To-day her figure bears only a distant resemblance to the natural body of woman. Let every woman among my readers

compare her undraped body with a classic Greek statue and she will at once see that they have not the same form. While the statue has harmonious curves and a line which only turns in a little bit at the waist, to spread out gently at the hips, the figure of the modern woman is sharply hollowed out at the waist, causing the hips to stick out brutally and ungracefully. Evidently, modern women have destroyed the natural harmony of their bodies.

How often do we see a woman who cannot sit down, rise, bend over or execute any natural movements harmoniously? She cannot sit on a low seat or display any suppleness of movement. She is no more in harmony with the natural life of the body. She is an artificial thing.

Moreover, she puts in many cases a premature end to her youth. Binding up and compressing the most important muscles of the body, she deprives them of exercise and their normal contractions. Thus they become weakened and atrophied.

Women owe to foolish fashions, tight shoes and improper corsets many of the diseases that afflict them—defects of circulation, weakening of the abdominal muscles, which are no longer able to support the most sensitive and essential organs, feet that cannot bear the weight of the body, a complexion without life, and what is most serious, sterility.

A healthy and vigorous human being has no need of artificial aids. In youth the free muscles acquire their vigor through harmonious exercise; later, if left free, they preserve their form.

from acquiring fat. On the contrary, the immobilized muscles are no longer able to burn up the fat by their activity as they would do if they were free.

Woman has made the mistake of concerning herself almost exclusively with her face. If her face is handsome and appears young, she is satisfied, because everybody sees it. Her body may be deformed, but she does not care, because she can hide it in fashionable clothes. That is to value beauty as an appearance and not as a reality. Perfect beauty is, of course rare and is not given to every woman. What is given to every woman, however, is the opportunity to become a perfectly harmonious and healthy creature capable of easy and repeated maternity.

We need not think that the loose ancient draperies, which are so beautiful, harmonious, are the only kind of clothing possible for the modern woman. That is a great mistake. Many styles of dress are possible, and we should aim to wear that which is in harmony with modern life. The only essential is that the natural undeformed outline of the human body should be preserved.

If our women do not choose to learn by themselves that maternity is to-day a primordial necessity we shall have to force them to understand it. After the war the public authorities will have to consider seriously the manner in which the frightful slaughter has affected the problem of depopulation.

Woman Needs a New Moral Education.

Even before the war our public authorities had been concerned with the question. Various measures were proposed, but they all ended in a proposition of taxation: a tax to be paid by the bachelor or a relief of taxation for large families. These measures are inefficient, for they are too gentle. However high the tax may be on bachelors, it will always be less than the cost of supporting a family. It will be necessary to find a more efficacious method. Heads of governments, presidents, kings, emperors and ministers will be obliged to consider it. To counterbalance the expense, which is constantly growing heavier, of a large family it will be necessary to show it some very substantial favors. The first should be the complete education and instruction of the children by the State, a training that will ensure them a living.

A complete solution simply by financial methods cannot be brought about. However valuable they may be, they will not be sufficient to balance the modern tendency to sterility. Merely to make the raising of children less expensive would not be sufficient to restore to women the love of maternity. We must begin a vast moral propaganda. We must make women regard their social duty as an ideal, make them feel the beauty of it and make them love it. A whole system of new education must be begun.

We must above all succeed in making civilized women accept intellectually the mission which uncivilized women accomplished naturally. The lost instinct must be replaced by the conscious will, and the second will be infinitely superior to the first.

It will be a propaganda by example, a propaganda by word and act. That is what the war has rendered imperatively necessary for us. Citizens of neutral countries must also aid in the work. They have suffered less by the war, and they owe this contribution to the future of humanity.

We must persuade women to consent to this voluntary conscription. They must learn to love maternity and, carrying on their own war, sacrifice on the altar of their ideal the foolish and evil fashions that have been the cruel enemy of beauty and maternity.

Let woman leave her hips free. Let her no longer martyrize her body, which has received the sacred mission of perpetuating humanity. By her conscious and resolute will let her become once more, with the grave joy of duty accomplished, the "Venus Genetrix," the original Eve, the mother of humanity.



"Future womanhood should model its ideals after the noble Venus Genetrix and discard the inartistic distortions of fashion."

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If country women grow old earlier than city women it is not, as certain cynical fashionables pretend, because they live naturally, but because of their ignorance of hygiene and the proper care of the body. Our peasant women destroy themselves just like the men whose work they share; they are the inevitable deformities of their calling. To be bent all day long over the earth and to lift great loads with gestures perpetually and daily repeated, must deform anybody quickly.

But if our city women, who understand hygiene and care for themselves, would wear loose and graceful costumes they would be more beautiful and enjoy better health; they would be better mothers and more prolific ones. Being squeezed in, as our fashionable women too often are, does not prevent them

Toe In and You Won't Have Flat Feet

ONE of the most annoying modern afflictions of the feet is the broken arch, or flat-foot. This malady has of recent years become so prevalent that it has attracted much attention from physicians and surgeons as well as military officers.

Fallen arch and flat-foot are caused largely by abuse of the feet in wrongly designed shoes. Until very recent years, the health and comfort of the feet have been wholly sacrificed to fantastic shapes and ridiculous heels.

Since the military authorities at West Point started their elaborate investigation in perfecting an anatomically correct army marching shoe, basing their recommendations largely on the conclusions of a treatise on the subject by Major Falcuin, of the Swiss army, this country has undergone a wave of interest in health for the feet, on which depend

health and poise of the body and mind.

The West Point officers found that flat-foot, which disables a man for all future usefulness in the army, is caused both by high heels which throw the foot out of its proper rocking balance, and by narrow and misshapen lasts which crowd the metatarsal bones.

To correct the modern tendency to fallen arches, the army is now instructed to march with the feet extended straight forward or even toeing in. To walk always with feet toeing outward, is to invite weakening and falling of the arch, just as a spring is flattened when extended.

Walking with the feet slightly toeing inward induces the natural cupping of the arch and the springy step. In foot races it will be noted that the successful runners all toe in, whereas those who cannot do this lose all chances of properly

applying their natural foot and leg leverage.

Another point worthy of note in this connection is the fact that modern civilized races have developed the great toe to the sacrifice of strength in all the others. The great toe does practically all the lifting and propelling work while the others are as useless as so many disjointed sticks.

This is due to tight shoes which compress the little toes and compel the wearer to direct his feet outward for relief when walking. Primal races, on the contrary, have all five toes of the feet well developed and well separated like the fingers of the hand, for individual action and assistance in the work to be performed.

When we consider that our feet do more physical work in the course of the day than any other part of the body, except the heart, we will perhaps be more willing to give some attention to their proper functioning.



Madame Valentine de Saint-Point, the Beautiful Parisian Poetess, Who is Leading a Fearless Crusade for Healthful Clothing.