

self to the stranger after a few weeks of residence. It is that the Americans respect marriage more than we do. It is that the customs being more simple and more pure, the heart of the young man is repugnant to what adultery represents of bitter emotions and ulcerated feelings even in happiness? Does time fail for the seductions which much be deeply planned and slowly? Is it the disgust of the lie, that feature so remarkable in the soul of the Anglo-Saxon? It is certain, however, that in society you will never hear allusion made to one of those liaisons such as exist and abound in Paris, and even in London—that line of demarcation between coquetry and intimacy, between the surroundings of the fault and the fault itself. American conversation always avoids it.

"Such things do not exist in the United States"

This is the phrase which I have heard several of my friends here express, and when I objected to one of them, the attitude of such and such women with such and such men, which seemed to me to bear indisputable evidence. "These women think it necessary to have a history," one of them replied, "because they have them in Europe. Only instead of hiding them, they publish them as much as possible, precisely because there is nothing serious in them"

The stranger can but reply by the great word of doubt of the most skeptical of people, and the least American "Sara." Reasons of a very different kind explain a priori, if one can say so, that the married woman should be more protected here than in the Old World.

The first, that we must not exaggerate, is the background of Puritanism which has lessened from year to year for the past fifty years almost from month to month. But it has not yet disappeared altogether. One of the most eloquent of the magistrates of Massachusetts, Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., has said in one of those short speeches so full of soul in which he excels: "Even if our mode of expressing our wonder, our awful fear, our abiding trust in face of life and death and of the unfathomable world has changed, yet at this day, even now, we New Englanders are still leavened with the Puritan ferment." This is true of New England, which continues to be the moral ferment of America. And it must be remembered that it is now but two hundred years since the Mosaic law, which punished adultery with death, was written in the code books of that New England.

The softening brought to bear upon that rigor was to mark only by the letter "A," branded with a red-hot iron, persons convicted of the crime. Such ferocities of legislation may well nigh be forgotten; they leave behind them in public opinion traces which are not to be effaced so quickly. The campaign of Dr. Parkhurst of last winter against the degraded women of New York and the raids executed under his direction on one of the most icy nights of December, on these inhabitants of the "Tenderlion" district—as this gay corner of Broadway is styled—gives evidence that the antique severeness of reform is not extinct. It is enough to make us understand the light Parisian fashion of accepting in joking at it, that the menage a trois is not yet that of the United States.

The second reason is less historic and less ideal. It comes from the extraordinary facility of divorce, at which the severe moralists shudder. If they are right, from the point of the greater good, they are assuredly wrong from the point of view of the lesser evil. Here again the Americans have obeyed their instincts of seeing things as they are, and of allowing themselves to be led by facts, accepting them without discussing. They started from that very simple idea, but which our Latin minds have not yet been able to admit, that divorce is never a danger to the good households, and that there is a great public and private interest that the bad ones should be broken

up as quickly and easily as possible. There has been a concurrence of State laws to facilitate divorce. The joke has often been made that the porters of the trains were wont to cry out:

"Chicago, twenty minutes! Ample time for divorce!"

If the American marriage is above all things an association, it seems that the American family is above all a companionship, a sort of social camping out, whose link, when it is strong, is so above all by the effect of individual sympathies, such as exist between persons who need not be of the same blood. I am sure, not from anecdotes, but from experience, that the friendship between brother and sister or sister and sister is here quite elective. It is the same with the relations of the father and the son and the same with the daughter. One of my young compatriots, very much in love with a young woman of New York, told me in one of those moments when the coldness of a woman that you love exasperates you to the point of the most cruel lucidity:—

"She had so little heart that she went to the theatre five weeks after the death of her mother, and no one was indignant about it!"

I know that the fact was true. But what does it prove? What proves that inequality of the share which the liberty of bequeathing introduces into the distribution of the legacies? Nothing else but that our sensitiveness is not the same as that of the people of this country. They have much more self-reliance, much more individual reaction, and above all a stronger will. That will acts on their heart as it acts on their brain. It appears to us less loving. But are we good judges?

It is that constant disassociation of the family life which we must always remember in order to understand a little the kind of celibacy of the soul, if one can say so, which the young woman in America continues to keep throughout marriage. Not more in the second period of her life than in the first does love play with her that preponderating part which seems to us inseparable from feminine destiny. When a Parisienne of forty years glances back it is the history of her emotions which her memory tells her. For an American woman of the same age it is more often the history of her actions, of what she calls, with a word which I have already quoted, her experiences. She has had between eighteen and twenty-five years a conception of her own person which was not handed over to her by tradition—she has none—nor by the counsels of her parents they have given her none—nor even by her nature, for the characteristic of those minds so easily adaptable is that the first instinct is without real shape and undetermined. They are like a blank, which the will takes upon itself to fill. What that will has traced there it has traced in letters which shall not be blotted out. Action, and again action, and always action, such is the unconscious yet constant motto of that woman.

Be it that she is hunting for a worldly position or that she is ambitious of an artistic culture, or that she gives herself over to matters of sport, or that she organizes classes, as they call them, to read with her friends Browning, Emerson or Shakespeare, that she travels in Europe, India or Japan, or that she remains at home with a young friend of hers to "pour" out cups of tea—you may be sure that she is constantly active always, indefatigably in the direction of her refinement and of her excitement. With what an accent those women pronounce these two words, which we must not fear to repeat, for in them are condensed almost all the American soul! They occur and recur in conversation, like two formulas where is revealed the obsession of the creature, who, born of a rough race and feeling herself refined, wishes to be more so and still more; who, grown up in full democracy, wishes to be aristocratic and yet more aristocratic; who, daughter of a world of enterprise, loves still to exaggerate in herself that feeling of nerves too much strained. To see thus fifteen, twenty, thirty, fifty of them, the character of eccentricity is abolished which you had found in them at first in comparison with Europeans.

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