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FOREWORD

A novelist needs, perhaps, to give no reasons for writing a book about men and women. Men and women are not only his materials but his life, and in their lives the novelist lives in a fashion which can scarcely be explained and which must be accepted. Why such material should be presented in this book, however, may be explained.

When I came to my own country after living most of my life in China, where the pattern for men and women was fixed, I found two obvious things which others coming here from abroad have mentioned more than once: the general discontent of our women and the marked lack of enjoyment between men and women. It takes no very keen observation to see these facts, though doubtless they are clearer to a newcomer than to those who live here. But I am less interested in the facts than in the reasons for them. Why, in a country such as ours, where woman is given every privilege and as much opportunity apparently as she wants, should she be so often dissatisfied in herself and so restless an influence in society? And why should man not like her better than he does?

In trying to find the answers to these questions I naturally reconsidered the old Chinese scheme of family life which is in such contrast to our own. Whether that scheme provides more possibility for happiness than ours and what sort of men and women developed under it as compared to ours made interesting speculation. My conclusion will be clear enough. It is simply that complete freedom is the atmosphere in which men and women can live together most happily. But it must be complete.

One final question may be asked. Why should this book be published now? Because time presses. In a strange and ominous way the fate of women everywhere in the world is linked with the trend toward fascism. To delay might mean to be compelled to silence.

P. S. B.

1. THE DISCORD

It has been my good fortune always to have found near me women of good sense. My earliest recollections center about two such women each in her way typical of her society. They were my American mother and my Chinese nurse. Although these two women were different in every moment of their history, they were curiously alike. My mother was the most capable and interesting woman I have ever known. Unusually well educated for her period, she was cultivated, humorous, brilliant, and strong. Though she went to China when she was twenty-three and died there forty-one years later, she remained unchanged by any Chinese influence. She developed from within, as American as if she had remained in her native land.

My nurse, Wang Amah, was almost as forceful, capable, and strong as my mother. She was illiterate but civilized, the daughter of a merchant family in the rich city of Yangchow. In some dire incident of her life my mother had rescued her, and the two women remained together from the moment they met until my nurse died a very old woman. In front of others they were mistress and servant, but when they were alone, especially in the evening before dinner when Wang Amah brushed for an hour my mother's long dark hair, their talk was intimately human and they were friends. My mother, it is true, confided to no one her own personal difficulties, but she had the genius of comforting wisdom which drew from others all their story. People came for miles over hilly roads and cobblestones only to tell her their sorrows. They were mostly women. I was a solitary child, quiet and often unnoticed, and talk went on before me. Very early, therefore, I perceived that women together led a life of their own.

For the life of Chinese women in those days, only recently past, fell into an inviolable pattern. Their place was in the home. The phrase is familiar the world over. But the Chinese woman, accepting it, made out of home something that I have seen nowhere else. In China the home was not what it is in our country, a thing apart from men's lives except when they return to it for food and sleep. The real life of the nation went on in the home. Even men were made an integral part of the home which Chinese women ruled, for the whole fabric of society was woven there in the intense and complicated life of great households where three or four generations lived under connecting roofs. Woman in China had little cause, one would have said, for ambition outside the home, for all her managerial

ability was needed to oversee the vast organization of old and young for which she was responsible. Religion, embodied in ancestor worship and temple visiting and the proper celebration of festivals and the rites necessary at birth and marriage and death, government, in the administering of the rules of civil law which gave even the criminal over to clan judgment, education, of boys for professions and business and of girls in training for their marriage, the comforting of the old, the care of the sick, responsibility for poor relatives—all these were the duties of women within the home.

It is no wonder, then, that the Chinese woman generally developed into a strong, wise, able human being, whether she could read or not. Literacy mattered peculiarly little to her. Women handed down to women a vast lore of history, custom, ritual, and practical knowledge which educated them and made them a part of the great national whole. But more valuable than any actual knowledge was the quiet and conscious conviction Chinese women have always had of their own worth. Look at a Chinese woman anywhere in the world, and you will see a human being of personality and poise who apologizes for nothing that she is or does, and in whose calm eyes shines her clear and tranquil soul. She knows her irreducible value as a woman. She does not worry about herself as compared to man. She accepts her difference and knows herself equal to him.

Indeed, she made so honorable her qualities, the so-called feminine qualities, that they began to be accepted as the essentials of a civilized people. Thus the he-man in China came to be considered not as male but merely as uncivilized. “The qualities of the feminine intelligence,” says Lin Yutang in *My Country and My People*, “are exactly the qualities of the Chinese mind.” Thus did the power of woman grow in China as she gathered the nation’s life into its homes and ruled there.

I took woman’s equality with man for granted, therefore, until I came to live in my own country seven years ago. American women I had known abroad, though in no great numbers. Those few were, I have found since, on the whole unusual women. I suppose there must always be something unusual in a woman who is willing to cross oceans and make a home on alien earth. Those American women did not differ too much from Chinese women except in outward habits. But I learned from them, and indeed my mother had already told me, that these habits signified something. The freedom with which American women went out of their homes, the informality with which they talked to men, and the whole spontaneity of their behavior were all signs of a free society. The pattern of men and women, I then learned for the first time, was different in America from the fixed and static pattern of men and women in China.

When I returned to my own country to live, therefore, I expected to find men and women really equal—that is, that the affairs of the nation, large and small,

were carried on by both alike. By this time there had been a revolution in China which had opened the doors of home and let women out. They came out poised, assured, self-confident, accustomed to executive responsibility; and they swarmed into schools, industries, and business, and even into government offices. I expected, of course, to see women in America even more assured and competent. Were they not long accustomed to participation in all parts of life?

My first surprise came when I asked for the name of a good bank, preferably a bank managed by women. Friends of mine had used a women's bank in Shanghai and had liked the way women there had handled investments. They found women astute, daring and cautious together. But in my own country, I was told, there is no bank owned and managed by women. When I asked why, I was told that no one would put money in such a bank. I have not to this day found the reason for this.

The next surprise came when I searched for a woman doctor, since I share the preference of Chinese women for women physicians to attend them. But I was told, and by women, that there are very few first-rate doctors in our country who are women. Most women here, it seems, even prefer men about them when they are in childbirth, although to my thinking then of all times the physician should be a woman. How can any man, however learned and sensitive, really understand the situation of a woman bearing a child? It is the one experience he cannot fully comprehend. Again, I have not yet been able to discover a reason for this preference for the male, though I persevered and found for myself an excellent physician who is also a woman.

Surprise followed upon surprise. Where I had expected in a free society to find women working everywhere as men worked, according to their ability, I found them actually less influential by far than women had been under the traditional scheme of life in China.

It is more than that woman's influence is almost totally lacking in the centers of American national life. She has somehow so conducted herself besides that her feminine qualities, which are her greatest gift and power, have come to be despised and looked upon as effeminate. Far from permeating society so that a civilized people came to despise crude force and to trust to reason, women in our country have even upheld the crudity of force as a desirable male attribute and have continued blind to the fact that in so doing they have fostered a society in which crude force manifests itself in gangsters and in wars. Somewhere in the home before even they go to school little boys learn to think that the superior male is tough and rough, and they struggle to form themselves on the model. I have actually heard American mothers tell their sons, "Don't be a sissy girl. You are a boy." If a certain kind of male is desired, I can understand this education, but what is one to think of women who deliberately teach their sons to despise women? Is it necessary to make the female inferior in order that the male may feel

himself, or even be, superior? Then what unjust inferiority is this, and how frail a superiority! It is no wonder that woman is of no real consequence in the life of our nation.

And yet as I write these words I question them. I sit here this morning in the old American farmhouse which is my home and think of many women of good sense in my immediate neighborhood. They are in almost every house working with quiet energy and intelligence to create order and comfort for their families. They are part of a community which I know is not unique, whose women as a matter of course work in homes and factories and upon farms. They carry on a tradition for women which I like to think of as peculiarly American, a classless tradition which makes it possible for a woman to scrub and clean a house, cook a fine meal, husk corn for twenty to thirty cents an hour in this region or do piece work in a shirt or pants factory or a hosiery mill and earn from ten to twenty-five dollars a week, and on occasion and certainly here on Sunday put on a good silk dress and look what she is, a "lady." She is, I say, a lady all the time. Her good sense makes her equal to any occasion. I watched one of her kind yesterday at work in her kitchen, thinking as I watched, "There—she's what I mean by an American woman."

Actually she was born in Hungary and came to America as one of a large family of children. Her parents farmed, and she grew up on American bread and milk and meat and fruit and garden stuff to be tall and strong and handsome, as she still is. She married young, a farmer, and they had six children. She kept house and cared for the children, and in the afternoon worked in the fields. To this day, though she is well over fifty, she loves to go out into the field. When she cries out, "Ah, I got to git my hands in the dirt," I know it is spring.

Her husband died early, and she was left a young widow with six children. What shall I tell of those years except that she managed, keeping her house and her children by washing and cooking for others or by any work she could find? The children are all grown up now, independent except for the youngest girl, and the first boy was married last year. She said the other day, her eyes misting, "I'm to be a grandmother by next Christmas." I knew by the satisfaction in her voice that the circle of her life was completed for her.

And she is not alone. There are many like her. I condoled with a neighbor's son the other day over the loss of a job. He said, "'Taint' too bad, for my wife works in the factory and she can hold us together till I get somethin'."

"Do most women work outside the home around here," I asked, "or do you have an unusual wife?"

"No, she ain't unusual—not like that, I mean," he said. "Women mostly help out their menfolks around here."

"Do you think," I persisted, "that they help out more than they used to?"

"No," he said. "Can't say as it's any different now from what it ever was. My

wife's mother worked in the shirt factory—still does; and my own mother worked in the hosiery. Reckon we're all used to work around here."

Roughly speaking, almost half of the women of America are used to work in this sense. They are busy, steady-hearted women, contributing their full share to their homes or to the community industry or to both. They are women of great good sense. Seeing their quiet competence and plain wisdom, I often wish that it could find wider use. This competence, this wisdom of life, are what the world lacks in the engine rooms of the nations. But women seem never to be found there, though indeed everywhere else. But why in a country free to them have our women at least not naturally and as a matter of course taken their place with men in the engine rooms of our society? And what of all those other women who need not work full time at home and who do not "help out" their men in field and factory? What are they making of their freedom? They, too, are not in the engine rooms. They are not "helping out" their men at all. Indeed, they live a life singularly separate from the lives of men and the nation's work.

I hold no brief for the old Chinese pattern of men and women. Ours is better, and even if it were not, it is ours and so better for us. And yet I am constrained to ask further, why do so many American women seem not happy in being women when they have the freedom to make what they will of themselves? And why do women and men not enjoy each other more in my country? I was used, in that rich family life of old China, which had its other evils, to this good—the great mutual enjoyment between men and women of all the details and events of the life that they made together. Then which is the best life for men and women, that in a patterned society such as old China had and in another sense as modern Germany has today, or the complete freedom which a true democracy alone can give? I say again, one or the other of the two must be best, for the half-and-half sort of thing we now have patently gives satisfaction to neither man nor woman; and when men and women are not content with and in each other then all of life is discord.

The basic discovery about any people, therefore, is the discovery of the relationship between its men and women. The traveler may tour until a landscape becomes as familiar to him as his own face in a mirror, but if he has not from experience or intimate observation in a country comprehended the way men and women feel toward each other, the measure of their understanding of each other, and the place each has in the life of the whole, the reality of that country has escaped him.

The fundamentals of men and women are the same anywhere. This difference in human beings, created into men and women, is common to us all. It is a difference more universal, deeper, more important than the differences of race and nation, and yet it is the one most ignored. One generalization only can be made on the ways in which men and women live together. When there is harmony between

men and women the culture of a country—that is, its whole life—is full, peaceful, and without nervous tensions, and progress is steady and rounded. Men and women enjoy each other then to the extent that their social customs allow, and this enjoyment is a fair indication of harmony between them. But when the relationship between men and women is confused and there is no harmony, and when they cannot much enjoy each other, then the general life is full of tension and irritations and strains. Point me out a people emotional, restless, argumentative, impulsive, volatile, changeable, violent in its prejudices, and I will point you out a people where men and women are at odds with each other, whether they know it or not or will admit it or not. Fortitude in hardships, good sense and balance in prosperity, a sense of proportion at all times—these are the fruits of harmony between men and women in a nation.

And effects seemingly quite remote may nevertheless be direct results of the fundamental lack of harmony. A widespread feeling of insecurity, for instance, commonly attributed to economic causes, is, I believe, far more to be ascribed to the deep emotional insecurity of men and women in each other. When they are uncertain of each other, doubtful of each other's loyalty either as individuals or as groups, there arises in every heart a feeling of isolation and solitariness that is hateful to it. For no human being was created to be solitary, and when it is cut off by doubt and distrust and lack of understanding from the other to whom instinctively it turns, whom nature has created for it, then strange stops and blocks and ills are inescapable. When in a period of social change the whole relationship of men and women shifts for a time as established customs break down and new ones have not yet been made, then necessarily, too, this cosmic loneliness besets the individual and undermines all his being and adds to the confusion of the times—which, indeed, to some extent it may have caused. So when men and women are not in harmony, when their lives and works are separate or contradictory, then all of life seems unsafe and dangerous. The prevailing national mood becomes despondent and fearful, and even figures and facts of increasing prosperity do not lighten it. Men and women can face anything, can endure anything, if they are sure of each other's loyalty and liking. They can endure nothing if they are not sure of each other.

Nor can individuals hope to escape the effects of the larger despondency about them. There will always be plenty of romantically happy marriages begun in each generation. Whether a fair number of these will continue to be happy will depend not only upon the couples but far more than they realize upon the relationship of men and women as a whole in their time. Discontent between those who can be fully happy only when there is content between them will arise too often even between two who are individually content with each other. For man remains man to the end of his days, and woman remains woman; and too often it is true that

these two never meet. It is a tragedy when they do not, because there is no joy like the joy of life when they do.

And I do not mean only the meeting of marriage. For marriage is only one of the ways of meeting between the two kinds of human beings. Every part of life has the possibility of the joy of their full meeting. All of life is right for men only if women they value comprehend and approve them for what they are, and all of life is right for women only if men they value comprehend and approve them. Love may have something to do with this once or twice in a lifetime, but most of the time it does not, and to assume that it does is to limit at once the whole relationship between men and women to what is only one of its expressions.

Of course men and women have some sort of relationship to each other from the moment they are born baby boys and girls to the moment that they die old men and women. They are never freed of each other, however great their love or dislike. For dislike is a relationship as valid as love, and true indifference is probably impossible. When indifference is proclaimed its very proclamation denies its reality. There is no use in pretending that men and women are not supremely important to each other, for they are, everywhere. A wise people recognizes this and provides for it in rational ways, and calmness in the national temper is the result.

When the ancient Chinese deliberately chose and developed to its highest point the traditional pattern of life which kept woman within the walls of home they did all they could to help her. They bound the feet of women so that they could not hobble many yards from their own gates, but they bound their minds also with fetters of ignorance and decreed that women were not to be given the general learning that was given to men. Women as a rule were not allowed even the opportunity to read and write. The Chinese were wise and humane in this. Having decided definitely that the place of woman was in the home and that in the home she was to stay, they arranged to confine her mind there as well as her body so that she did not know for centuries that she was a prisoner. What exquisite horrible torture had they bound her feet alone and then liberated her mind! What agony to sit behind a wall beyond which she could not go and contemplate a world alive with activity and enjoyment and discovery but forbidden to her!

But no, the Chinese, merciful to their women, spared them such torture. Women lived in their homes quietly and happily ignorant and embroidered pretty little shoes for their crippled feet, little shoes they never took off even at night lest men see the real deformity they hid. They made of their feet "golden lilies," and men fondled them as acts of love and wrote poems about them. The tiny feet of Chinese women were for centuries sexual symbols. Men felt their passions stir merely at the sight of a woman's embroidered pointed satin shoe, three inches long and the width of two fingers. And when modern times came, it was women

who did not want to give up their little feet. They had for so long wielded their power over men by those little feet.

Women had grown very powerful. Within the confines of their lives, narrow in space, they had gone deep and climbed high. They had come to understand completely the nature of men. They knew men's every weakness and used such weakness ruthlessly for their own ends, good or evil. Lacking other education, they devised cunning and wile and deviousness and charm, and they had men wholly in their power, confounding simple men by their wisdom and learned men by their childishness. Men had to feed, clothe, and shelter them. Men had to work for them, fight for them, and protect them. Man's one reward they gave him. It was to allow him a feeling of superiority because he was a male, and as they granted him this in seeming generosity, they hid their smiles behind their pretty embroidered sleeves.

The greatest evil in this old Chinese scheme of life for men and women was that it was so unfair to men. As women in the home grew too powerful men were weakened and warped by them, and became helpless. For woman, confined to her home by long custom until she looked on it as her natural sphere and had no desire to go beyond it, became a tyrant there. If she were stupid she ruined man's digestion by being too good a cook and by insisting that he eat all she cooked. Or she encouraged him to take his ease and not to exert himself and even though he gladly yielded he had his hours of uncomfortable remorse because he knew he was wasting his life. And yet the stupid woman in the house was not worse than the intelligent woman there, who by her restless energy drove man to do what he did not want to do and more than he wanted to do, compelling him to fulfill her rather than himself.

The misfortune is, of course, that women are quite often born with brains. The scheme which limits woman to homes should provide some means against her inheriting an intelligence equal to man's, which she does not need. If all women could be born with inferior minds and men with superior ones, the scheme of women for the home would doubtless be perfectly satisfactory. But unless that can be done, it is not satisfactory. Four thousand years of Chinese experience prove it. The eminently rational Chinese did everything they could to ensure harmony between men and women in the pattern of tradition. They kept woman ignorant and limited her to the home and its cares and to the breeding of children. They made having children woman's chief duty and greatest glory. They heaped honor upon the mothers of sons. Moreover, they actually accomplished what has been so far an impossible achievement in the western countries such as the United States and England: the Chinese gave marriage to every woman. This, they thought, was only fair. They said, if society decrees that woman's place is in the home, then it is but justice to see that every woman has a home to go to; anything else is

unrealistic.

But such justice they knew had to be made compulsory. It cannot be left to men alone. For, as the Chinese found a good many centuries before we did, too many men, left to themselves, will not marry. To marry, man discovered long ago, is a very serious matter for him. For one thing, it fixes the responsibility of fatherhood. If a man is not married to a woman, there is always the chance that he is not a father. But when he is the only man to whom the woman is accessible, there is no escape for him. He has to support his offspring and the woman, too. And a surprisingly small number of men are natural fathers, the ancient Chinese found. Far too many have fatherhood thrust upon them. It was in fact a disagreeable awakening for men in early Chinese history when they discovered indisputably that there was a definite relation between sleeping with a woman and an infant some months later. Women suspected the connection long before men did and then became convinced of it. But men only reluctantly came to believe it.

When it was formally acknowledged to be true, however, the Chinese in their rational way organized their life around the fact. Since children came of men and women together, they must live together for the children. But man had no idea of giving up his private freedom to this agreement. He would feed the woman and child and provide their shelter. In that shelter they must stay, but he would continue to roam as he pleased. This was the beginning of home for the woman. And so woman stayed in it, century after century, and she was kept ignorant except of cooking and sewing and elementary child care, while man continued to roam—that is, he was educated for the activities of business, government, and the arts, and all the life outside the home.

Thus marriage was made obligatory. This was not, of course, so stated. The Chinese are a subtle people. They do not make laws and expect people automatically to obey them. Neither do they believe in the efficacy of force upon human beings except as a necessity for some temporary occasion. They know that if people can be persuaded to want to do a thing, it is the most permanent way of achieving that end. In order to make marriage obligatory, therefore, the Chinese encouraged ancestor worship. They knew that the human individual fears above all else the extinction of death, and they proclaimed the doctrine that if a man had sons he did not die. The worship his sons gave his spirit when his body died kept him alive, they said. Therefore a man ought to have sons, the more the better, since so many children inevitably died young. But that he might have legal sons, and sons he was sure were from his own seed, he must marry. The price of a man's immortality was thus made to depend on marriage, and only when this came about did men take marriage as a necessity. Then fathers arranged for the marriage of their sons and women were encouraged to make breeding their chief

duty so that when a woman was barren, if she were a truly good woman, she did not complain if her husband brought other women into the house. She even encouraged him to do so, denying her own heart that Right might be done.

It was called Right, of course, or people would not have denied themselves to do it. The wise Chinese knew that nothing so nerves and strengthens the poor average human heart as a demand put upon it for noble self-sacrifice in the cause of some Right. So throughout the centuries many an ignorant Chinese woman with all her pitiful heart has bade her beloved take another in her place to give him the sons she could not give him. It is not easy—it was never easy. I have heard their sad stories of how the night through they have stuffed their quilts into their mouths, silk quilts, ragged quilts, so that men could not hear the sound of weeping. But they always believed their men were doing right.

There was another wisdom in this custom, too. By some strange will of Nature, women are everywhere stronger in body than men are, and they can live when men must die; and so there are nearly always too many women. This grew dangerous in China, for the natural resistance of the female there was fortified by the handicaps of her existence. She was spared the coddling and dainty feeding and all that whole weakening process of spoiling that was given to the precious boys; and so girls lived, unfortunately, when boys died. Polygamy was the only resource if woman was to be kept in the home. Except the deliberate infanticides of girls, polygamy will be the only resource in any country that insists that women be kept in the home, and especially if warfare is to be the chief occupation of the men. In spite of the fact that modern warfare today kills more women and children than it once did, the death rate for men is still likely to be higher than it is for women. So polygamy was made legal in old China.

All might still have worked out well enough for men and women in that clearly defined Chinese scheme of life if unfortunately women had not continued to be born with brains which no limitation, physical or mental, could subdue. There were too many clever women, too many intelligent women, everywhere in every household. These restless creatures, finding themselves ignorant and kept within walls, did not, as they should have done, subside into quiescence or content. Instead they occupied themselves with getting their own way and with becoming powerful in any fashion they could.

“You do not know,” Reynaud sighed in fallen France only the other day, “to what lengths a man will go to secure an evening’s peace!”

So has sighed many a man in China, returning to his home at night to face a strong, willful, intelligent woman whose whole too-able mind concentrates itself upon him. If she is beautiful, and she is more often beautiful than not, for she knows beauty is one of his weaknesses, he is lost before he ever opens the door to her chamber, and helplessly he knows it.

Long before modern China gave to women complete equality woman in China was man's superior. In fact, I have even suspected that when the modern revolution came he was glad to insist on her becoming only equal with him at last. It was a forward step for him, and she lost by it. She had to stop being a willful creature who made the most of her ignorance and who got all she wanted by pretending to be childish and irresponsible and weak and charming while actually she was strong, tough, executively able and mentally shrewd. It was man in China who hastened to write into the constitution that woman had to be equal with him and accept equal responsibility as an adult individual. He gladly threw open all schools and professions to her, and what must his satisfaction be today as he sees her take up her gun and march beside him to battle!

Yes, for any nation contemplating the return of woman to the home, I recommend before taking the step a thorough study of the history of Chinese men and women, for there women had the best of it. They used their ignorance to confound men's wisdom. As ignorant creatures, they had no necessity for rational behavior, and they early saw this. Tempers and tantrums, and fads and whimsies—what else, men said, could they expect from women? When they came home tired at night they yielded anything for peace.

And being ignorant, women, though powerful, were not even good mothers to men. Too many of their sons died young and teaching them elementary child care did little good. For the uneducated mind cannot really be taught anything. It grows up preoccupied with its own ignorant ideas. It is convinced of its own rightness. Only the truly educated mind knows the possibility of error. And so the ignorant Chinese mother was always sure, secretly, that there was nothing in any new idea; and if she was stupid besides, then she was unteachable, and her beloved sons suffered from the very excess of her love.

Thus do men always suffer when women are ignorant. They suffer more than women, not only because women are stronger than men and more resistant, but because men are peculiarly vulnerable to the damage ignorant women can do at the periods of their life when they most need intelligent and wise care: in infancy, in adolescence, in times of illness and mental and emotional crisis, and in old age. Wise Chinese saw this, too, and endeavored to mitigate the danger by taking boys out of the care of women early in childhood. Thus boys as young as seven were taken into the quarters for men. But fathers were often away from home and mothers were always there, and boys ran back to women who indulged and spoiled them and fed them with sweets—all with loving intention. Through loving intention century after century Chinese men grew weak at the hands of women.

For men cannot be free in a nation where women are forbidden freedom. China has found that out at last. Today every door stands open to men and women alike. This was true even before the war, but war has hastened the equalizing process.

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