

Franz Hartmann on Chastity



From *Five Years of Theosophy: Mystical, Philosophical, Theosophical, Historical, and Scientific Essays selected from "The Theosophist."*¹ London: Reeves & Turner, 1885; pp. 139-43. Frontispiece: Bouquet by John William Godward.

IDEAL WOMAN IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WORK of the evolution of forms (in our days she is very often only a beautiful work of art). A beautiful woman is the most attractive, charming, and lovely being that a man can imagine. I never saw a male being who could lay any claims to manly vigour, strength or courage, who was not an admirer of woman. Only a profligate, a coward or a sneak would hate women; a hero and a *man* admires woman, and is admired by her.

Women's love belongs to a complete man. Then she smiles on him his human nature becomes aroused, his animal desires like little children begin to clamour for bread, they do not want to be starved, they want to satisfy their hunger. His whole soul flies towards the lovely being, which attracts him with almost irresistible force, and if his higher principles, his divine spirit, is not powerful enough to restrain him, his soul follows the temptations of his physical body. Once again the animal nature has subdued the divine. Woman rejoices in her victory, and man is ashamed of his weakness; and instead of being a representation of strength, he becomes an object of pity.

To be truly powerful a man must retain his power and never for a moment lose it. To lose it is to surrender his divine nature to his animal nature; to restrain his desires and retain his power, is to assert his divine right, and to become more than a man — a god.

Éliphas Lévi says:

To be an object of attraction for all women, you must desire none;²

and everyone who has had a little experience of his own must know that he is right. Woman wants what she cannot get, and what she can get she does not want. Perhaps it is to the man endowed with spiritual power, that the Bible refers, when it says:

To him who has much, more shall be given, and from him who has little, that little shall be taken away.³

To become perfect it is not required that we should be born without any animal desires. Such a person would not be much above an idiot; he would be rightly despised and laughed at by every true man and woman; but we must obtain the power to control our desires, instead of being controlled by them; and here lies the true philosophy of temptation.

¹ April 1884, Vol. V, p. 161

² [Cf. "Woman enchains you by your desires; master your desires and you will enchain her." *Transcendental Magic*, (THE CANDIDATE) p. 32; tr. Waite.]

³ [Matthew xiii, 12]

If a man has no higher aim in life than to eat and drink and propagate his species; if all his aspirations and desires are centred in a wish of living a happy life in the bosom of his family; there can be no wrong if he follows the dictates of his nature and is satisfied with his lot. When he dies, his family will mourn, his friends will say he was a good fellow; they will give him a first-class funeral, and they will perhaps write on his tombstone something like what I once saw in a certain churchyard:

Here is the grave of John McBride,
He lived, got married, and died.

And that will be the end of Mr. John McBride, until in another incarnation he will wake up again perhaps as Mr. John Smith, or Ramchandra Row, or Patrick O' Flanagan, to find himself on much the same level as he was before.

But if a man has higher aims and objects in life, if he wants to avoid an endless cycle of re-incarnations, if he wants to become a master of his destiny, then must he first become a master of himself. How can he expect to be able to control the external forces of Nature, if he cannot control the few little natural forces that reside within his own insignificant body?

To do this, it is not necessary that a man should run away from his wife and family, and leave them uncared for. Such a man would commence his spiritual career with an act of injustice — an act that like Banquo's ghost⁴ would always haunt him and hinder him in his further progress. If a man has taken upon himself responsibilities, he is bound to fulfil them, and an act of cowardice would be a bad beginning for a work that requires courage.

A celibate, who has no temptation and who has no one to care for but himself, has undoubtedly superior advantages for meditation and study. Being away from all irritating influences, he can lead what may be called a selfish life; because he looks out only for his own spiritual interest; but he has little opportunity to develop his will-power by resisting temptations of every kind. But the man who is surrounded by the latter, and is every day and every hour under the necessity of exercising his will-power to resist their surging violence, will, if he rightly uses these powers, become strong; he may not have as much opportunity for study as the celibate, being more engrossed in material cares; but when he rises up to a higher state in his next incarnation, his will-power will be more developed, and he will be in the possession of the password, which is CONTINENCE.

A slave cannot become a commander, until after he becomes free. A man who is subject to his own animal desires, cannot command the animal nature of others. A muscle becomes developed by its use, an instinct or habit is strengthened in proportion as it is permitted to rule, a mental power becomes developed by practice, and the principle of will grows strong by exercise; and this is the use of temptations. To have strong passions and to overcome them, makes man a hero. The sexual instinct is the strongest of all, and he who vanquishes it, becomes a god.

⁴ [*Macbeth*, Act III, scene 4]

The human soul admires a beautiful form, and is therefore an idolater.

The human spirit adores a principle, and is the true worshipper.

Marriage is the union of the male spirit with the female soul for the purpose of propagating the species; but if in its place there is only a union of a male and a female body, then marriage becomes merely a brutal act, which lowers man and woman, not to the level of animals but below them; because animals are restricted to certain seasons for the exercise of their procreative powers; while man, being a reasonable being, has it in his power to use or abuse them at all times.

But how many marriages do we find that are really spiritual and not based on beauty of form or other considerations? How soon after the wedding-day do they become disgusted with each other? What is the cause of this? A man and a woman may marry and their characters may differ widely. They may have different tastes, different opinions and different inclinations. All those differences may disappear, and will probably disappear; because by living together they become accustomed to each other, and become equalized in time. Each influences the other, and as a man may grow fond of a pet snake, whose presence at first horrified him, so a man may put up with a disagreeable partner and become fond of her in course of time.

But if the man allows full liberty to his animal passions, and exercises his “legal rights” without restraint, these animal cravings which first called so piteously for gratification, will soon be gorged, and flying away laugh at the poor fool who nursed them in his breast. The wife will come to know that her husband is a coward, because she sees him squirm under the lash of his animal passions; and as woman loves strength and power, so in proportion as he loses his love, will she lose her confidence. He will look upon her as a burden, and she will look upon him in disgust as a brute. Conjugal happiness will have departed, and misery, divorce or death will be the end.

The remedy for all these evils is continence, and it has been our object to show its necessity, for it was the object of this article.



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