Physical and Moral

Woman is in general less strong than man, smaller, and less capable of sustained labor. Her blood is more aqueous; her flesh less firm; her hair longer; her limbs more rounded; her arms less muscular; her mouth smaller; her hips more prominent; and her belly larger. These physical qualities distinguish women all over the world, and from all races, from Lapland to the coast of Guinea, from America to China.

Plutarch, in the third book of his “Symposiacs,” pretends that wine will not intoxicate them so easily as men; and the following is the reason he gives for this falsehood:

“The temperament of women is very moist; this, with their courses, renders their flesh so soft, smooth, and clear. When wine encounters so much humidity, it is overcome, and it loses its color and its strength, becoming discolored and weak. Something also may be gathered from the reasoning of Aristotle, who observes, that they who drink great draughts without drawing their breath, which the ancients call ‘amusizein,’ are not intoxicated so soon as others; because the wine does not remain within the body, but being forcibly taken down, passes rapidly off. Now we generally perceive that women drink in this manner; and it is probable that their bodies, in consequence of the continual attraction of the humors, which are carried off in their periodical visitations, are filled with many conduits, and furnished with numerous pipes and channels, into which the wine disperses rapidly and easily, without having time to affect the noble and principal parts, by the disorder of which intoxication is produced.” These physics are altogether worthy of the ancients.

Women live somewhat longer than men; that is to say, in a generation we count more aged women than aged men. This fact has been observed by all
who have taken accurate accounts of births and deaths in Europe; and it is thought that it is the same in Asia, and among the Negresses, the copper-colored, and olive-complexioned, as among the white. “Natura est semper sibi consona.” [Nature is always consonant with itself.]

We have elsewhere adverted to an extract from a Chinese journal, which states, that in the year 1725, the wife of the emperor Yontchin made a distribution among the poor women of China who had passed their seventieth year; and that, in the province of Canton alone, there were 98,222 females aged more than seventy, 40,893 beyond eighty, and 3,453 of about the age of a hundred. Those who advocate final causes say, that nature grants them a longer life than men, in order to recompense them for the trouble they take in bringing children into the world and rearing them. It is scarcely to be imagined that nature bestows recompenses, but it is probable that the blood of women being milder, their fibers harden less quickly.

No anatomist or physician has ever been able to trace the secret of conception. Sanchez has curiously remarked: “Mariam et spiritum sanctum emisisse semen in copulatione, et ex semine amborum natum esse Jesum.” This abominable impertinence of the most knowing Sanchez is not adopted at present by any naturalist.

The periodical visitations which weaken females, while they endure the maladies which arise out of their suppression, the times of gestation, the necessity of suckling children, and of watching continually over them, and the delicacy of their organization, render them unfit for the fatigue of war, and the fury of the combat. It is true, as we have already observed, that in almost all times and countries women have been found on whom nature has bestowed extraordinary strength and courage, who combat with men, and undergo prodigious labor; but, after all, these examples are rare. On this point we refer to the article on “Amazons.”

Physics always govern morals. Women being weaker of body than we are, there is more skill in their fingers, which are more supple than ours. Little able to labor at the heavy work of masonry, carpentering, metal working, or the plough, they are necessarily entrusted with the lighter labors of the
interior of the house, and, above all, with the care of children. Leading a more sedentary life, they possess more gentleness of character than men, and are less addicted to the commission of enormous crimes—a fact so undeniable, that in all civilized countries there are always fifty men at least executed to one woman.

Montesquieu, in his “Spirit of Laws,” undertaking to speak of the condition of women under divers governments, observes that “among the Greeks women were not regarded as worthy of having any share in genuine love; but that with them love assumed a form which is not to be named.” He cites Plutarch as his authority.

This mistake is pardonable only in a wit like Montesquieu, always led away by the rapidity of his ideas, which are often very indistinct. Plutarch, in his chapter on love, introduces many interlocutors; and he himself, in the character of Daphneus, refutes, with great animation, the arguments of Protagenes in favor of the commerce alluded to.

It is in the same dialogue that he goes so far as to say, that in the love of woman there is something divine; which love he compares to the sun, that animates nature. He places the highest happiness in conjugal love, and concludes by an eloquent eulogium on the virtue of Epponina. This memorable adventure passed before the eyes of Plutarch, who lived some time in the house of Vespasian. The above heroine, learning that her husband Sabinus, vanquished by the troops of the emperor, was concealed in a deep cavern between Franche-Comté and Champagne, shut herself up with him, attended on him for many years, and bore children in that situation. Being at length taken with her husband, and brought before Vespasian, who was astonished at her greatness of soul, she said to him: “I have lived more happily under ground than you in the light of the sun, and in the enjoyment of power.” Plutarch therefore asserts directly the contrary to that which is attributed to him by Montesquieu, and declares in favor of woman with an enthusiasm which is even affecting.

It is not astonishing, that in every country man has rendered himself the master of woman, dominion being founded on strength. He has ordinarily,
too, a superiority both in body and mind. Very learned women are to be found in the same manner as female warriors, but they are seldom or ever inventors.

A social and agreeable spirit usually falls to their lot; and, generally speaking, they are adapted to soften the manners of men. In no republic have they ever been allowed to take the least part in government; they have never reigned in monarchies purely elective; but they may reign in almost all the hereditary kingdoms of Europe—in Spain, Naples, and England, in many states of the North, and in many grand fiefs which are called “feminines.”

Custom, entitled the Salic law, has excluded them from the crown of France; but it is not, as Mézeray remarks, in consequence of their unfitness for governing, since they are almost always entrusted with the regency.

It is pretended, that Cardinal Mazarin confessed that many women were worthy of governing a kingdom; but he added, that it was always to be feared they would allow themselves to be subdued by lovers who were not capable of governing a dozen pullets. Isabella in Castile, Elizabeth in England, and Maria Theresa in Hungary, have, however, proved the falsity of this pretended bon-mot, attributed to Cardinal Mazarin; and at this moment we behold a legisatrix in the North as much respected as the sovereign of Greece, of Asia Minor, of Syria, and of Egypt, is disesteemed.

It has been for a long time ignorantly assumed, that women are slaves during life among the Mohammedans; and that, after their death, they do not enter paradise. These are two great errors, of a kind which popes are continually repeating in regard to Mohammedanism. Married women are not at all slaves; and the Sura, or fourth chapter of the Koran, assigns them a dowry. A girl is entitled to inherit one-half as much as her brother; and if there are girls only, they divide among them two-thirds of the inheritance; and the remainder belongs to the relations of the deceased, whose mother also is entitled to a certain share. So little are married women slaves, they are entitled to demand a divorce, which is granted when their complaints are deemed lawful.
A Mohammedan is not allowed to marry his sister-in-law, his niece, his foster-sister, or his daughter-in-law brought up under the care of his wife. Neither is he permitted to marry two sisters; in which particular the Mohammedan law is more rigid than the Christian, as people are every day purchasing from the court of Rome the right of contracting such marriages, which they might as well contract gratis.

**Polygamy**

Mahomet has limited the number of wives to four; but as a man must be rich in order to maintain four wives, according to his condition, few except great lords avail themselves of this privilege. Therefore, a plurality of wives produces not so much injury to the Mohammedan states as we are in the habit of supposing; nor does it produce the depopulation which so many books, written at random, are in the habit of asserting.

The Jews, agreeable to an ancient usage, established, according to their books, ever since the age of Lameth, have always been allowed several wives at a time. David had eighteen; and it is from his time that they allow that number to kings; although it is said that Solomon had as many as seven hundred.

The Mohammedans will not publicly allow the Jews to have more than one wife; they do not deem them worthy of that advantage; but money, which is always more powerful than law, procures to rich Jews, in Asia and Africa, that permission which the law refuses.

It is seriously related, that Lelius Cinna, tribune of the people, proclaimed, after the death of Cæsar, that the dictator had intended to promulgate a law allowing women to take as many husbands as they pleased. What sensible man can doubt, that this was a popular story invented to render Cæsar odious? It resembles another story, which states that a senator in full senate formally professed to give Cæsar permission to cohabit with any woman he pleased. Such silly tales dishonor history, and injure the minds of those who credit them. It is a sad thing, that Montesquieu should give credit to this fable.
It is not, however, a fable that the emperor Valentinian, calling himself a Christian, married Justinian during the life of Severa, his first wife, mother of the emperor Gratian; but he was rich enough to support many wives.

Among the first race of the kings of the Franks, Gontran, Cherebert, Sigebert, and Chilperic, had several wives at a time. Gontran had within his palace Venerande, Mercatruide, and Ostregilda, acknowledged for legitimate wives; Cherebert had Merflida, Marcovesa, and Theodogilda.

It is difficult to conceive how the ex-Jesuit Nonnotte has been able, in his ignorance, to push his boldness so far as to deny these facts, and to say that the kings of the first race were not polygamists, and thereby, in a libel in two volumes, throw discredit on more than a hundred historical truths, with the confidence of a pedant who dictates lessons in a college. Books of this kind still continue to be sold in the provinces, where the Jesuits have yet a party, and seduce and mislead uneducated people.

Father Daniel, more learned and judicious, confesses the polygamy of the French kings without difficulty. He denies not the three wives of Dagobert I., and asserts expressly that Theodoret espoused Deutery, although she had a husband, and himself another wife called Visigalde. He adds, that in this he imitated his uncle Clothaire, who espoused the widow of Cleodomir, his brother, although he had three wives already.

All historians admit the same thing; why, therefore, after so many testimonies, allow an ignorant writer to speak like a dictator, and say, while uttering a thousand follies, that it is in defense of religion? as if our sacred and venerable religion had anything to do with an historical point, although made serviceable by miserable calumniators to their stupid impostures.

Of the Polygamy Allowed by Certain Popes and Reformers
The Abbé Fleury, author of the “Ecclesiastical History,” pays more respect to truth in all which concerns the laws and usages of the Church. He avows that Boniface, confessor of Lower Germany, having consulted Pope Gregory, in the year 726, in order to know in what cases a husband might be allowed to have two wives, Gregory replied to him, on the 22nd of November, of the same year, in these words: “If a wife be attacked by a malady which renders her unfit for conjugal intercourse, the husband may marry another; but in that case he must allow his sick wife all necessary support and assistance.” This decision appears conformable to reason and policy; and favors population, which is the object of marriage.

But that which appears opposed at once to reason, policy, and nature, is the law which ordains that a woman, separated from her husband both in person and estate, cannot take another husband, nor the husband another wife. It is evident that a race is thereby lost; and if the separated parties are both of a certain temperament, they are necessarily exposed and rendered liable to sins for which the legislators ought to be responsible to God, if—

The decrees of the popes have not always had in view what was suitable to the good of estates, and of individuals. This same decree of Pope Gregory II., which permits bigamy in certain cases, denies conjugal rights forever to the boys and girls, whom their parents have devoted to the Church in their infancy. This law seems as barbarous as it is unjust; at once annihilating posterity, and forcing the will of men before they even possess a will. It is rendering the children the slaves of a vow which they never made; it is to destroy natural liberty, and to offend God and mankind.

The polygamy of Philip, landgrave of Hesse, in the Lutheran community, in 1539, is well known. I knew a sovereign in Germany, who, after having married a Lutheran, had permission from the pope to marry a Catholic, and retained both his wives.

It is well known in England, that the chancellor Cowper married two wives, who lived together in the same house in a state of concord which did honor to all three. Many of the curious still possess the little book which he composed in favor of polygamy.
We must distrust authors who relate, that in certain countries women are allowed several husbands. Those who make laws everywhere are born with too much self-love, are too jealous of their authority, and generally possess a temperament too ardent in comparison with that of women, to have instituted a jurisprudence of this nature. That which is opposed to the general course of nature is very rarely true; but it is very common for the more early travelers to mistake an abuse for a law.

The author of the “Spirit of Laws” asserts, that in the caste of Nairs, on the coast of Malabar, a man can have only one wife, while a woman may have several husbands. He cites doubtful authors, and above all Picard; but it is impossible to speak of strange customs without having long witnessed them; and if they are mentioned, it ought to be doubtingly; but what lively spirit knows how to doubt?

“The lubricity of women,” he observes, “is so great at Patan, the men are constrained to adopt certain garniture, in order to be safe against their amorous enterprises.”

The president Montesquieu was never at Patan. Is not the remark of M. Linguet judicious, who observes, that this story has been told by travelers who were either deceived themselves, or who wished to laugh at their readers? Let us be just, love truth, and judge by facts, not by names.

*End of the Reflections on Polygamy*

It appears that power, rather than agreement, makes laws everywhere, but especially in the East. We there beheld the first slaves, the first eunuchs, and the treasury of the prince directly composed of that which is taken from the people.

He who can clothe, support, and amuse a number of women, shuts them up in a menagerie, and commands them despotically. Ben Aboul Kiba, in his “Mirror of the Faithful,” relates that one of the viziers of the great Solyman addressed the following discourse to an agent of Charles V.:
“Dog of a Christian!—for whom, however, I have a particular esteem—you can not reproach me for possessing four wives, according to our holy laws, whilst you emptiest a dozen barrels a year, and I drink not a single glass of wine? What good dost you effect by passing more hours at table than I do in bed? I may get four children a year for the service of my august master, whilst you canst scarcely produce one, and that only the child of a drunkard, whose brain will be obscured by the vapors of the wine which has been drunk by his father. What, moreover, wouldst you have me do, when two of my wives are in child-bed? Must I not attend to the other two, as my law commands me? What becomes of them? what part dost you perform, in the latter months of the pregnancy of your only wife, and during her lyings-in and sexual maladies? You either remain idle, or your repair to another woman. Behold thyself between two mortal sins, which will infallibly cause thee to fall headlong from the narrow bridge into the pit of hell.

“I will suppose, that in our wars against the dogs of Christians we lose a hundred thousand soldiers; behold a hundred thousand girls to provide for. Is it not for the wealthy to take care of them? Evil betide every Mussulman so cold-hearted as not to give shelter to four pretty girls, in the character of legitimate wives, or to treat them according to their merits!

“What is done in your country by the trumpeter of day, which you calls the cock; the honest ram, the leader of the flock; the bull, sovereign of the heifers; has not every one of them his seraglio? It becomes thee, truly, to reproach me with my four wives, whilst our great prophet had eighteen, the Jew David, as many, and the Jew Solomon, seven hundred, all told, with three hundred concubines! You perceive that I am modest. Cease, then, to reproach a sage with luxury, who is content with so moderate a repast. I permit thee to drink; allow me to love. You changes your wines; permit me to change my females. Let every one suffer others to live according to the customs of their country. your hat was not made to give laws to my turban; your ruff and your curtailed doublets are not to command my doliman. Make an end of your coffee, and go and caress your German spouse, since you art allowed to have no other.”

Reply of the German
“Dog of a Mussulman! for whom I retain a profound veneration; before I finish my coffee I will confute all your arguments. He who possesses four wives, possesses four harpies, always ready to calumniate, to annoy, and to fight one another. your house is the den of discord, and none of them can love thee. Each has only a quarter of your person, and in return can bestow only a quarter of her heart. None of them can serve to render your life agreeable; they are prisoners who, never having seen anything, have nothing to say; and, knowing only thee, are in consequence your enemies. You art their absolute master; they therefore hate thee. You art obliged to guard them with eunuchs, who whip them when they are too happy. You pretends to compare thyself to a cock, but a cock never has his pullets whipped by a capon. Take animals for your examples, and copy them as much as you pleases; for my part, I love like a man; I would give all my heart, and receive an entire heart in return. I will give an account of this conversation to my wife to-night, and I hope she will be satisfied. As to the wine with which you reproaches me, if it is an evil to drink it in Arabia, it is a very praiseworthy habit in Germany.—Adieu!”

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