

# **ORIGINAL ESSAYS**

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Original Essays by S. Tolver Preston

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**S. TOLVER PRESTON**

**ORIGINAL  
ESSAYS**



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i.  
ON THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF THE SEXES.

ii.  
SCIENCE AND SECTARIAN RELIGION.

iii.  
ON THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF PERSONAL  
RESPONSIBILITY,

WITH A REPRINT FROM AN ESSAY ON "EVOLUTION AND FEMALE  
EDUCATION," REVISED FROM *Nature*, SEPTEMBER 23, 1880.

BY

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numerous original papers in Natural Science, etc.*

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## ESSAY I.

### On the Social Relations of the Sexes.

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No one would be bold enough to assert that society has by any means reached a perfect state yet. Admittedly one of the best methods of conducing to this end is the just and scientific exposition of the fundamental principles of conduct in general. Although it will be conceded that the social relations of the sexes (or the ethical principles regulating them) constitute one of the most important phases of conduct; yet this branch of ethical science has notoriously been much neglected by scientific writers. Two main causes have perhaps contributed to this:—(1) The dislike to risk the odium or ridicule of the foolish or unreflecting portion of society (*numerically* not unimportant); (2) The fear that an attempt to point plainly to the truth might be premature in the present state of society, or might lead to abuses—arguments which, however, must appear of so questionable and superficial a kind on a careful

consideration of the subject, as to exhibit the necessity for a free discussion in all the stronger light. We may reasonably expect that the backwardness of views on this question will be in direct proportion to the previous neglect of its discussion, and therefore the benefits to be derived from an open-day analysis all the greater on that account.

Those especially who can appreciate the truth of the great principle of Evolution established by Darwin, or who look to the Rise of Man from some lower form as a firmly grounded scientific fact, must be struck with the analogy that exists between man (more especially among the less intelligent masses) and the lower animal world, in regard to the want of reason or recognition of rational principles governing the social relations of the sexes. It is, of course, evident that the sexual passion must inevitably have its origin in determinate physical causes, which constitute its *raison d'être*, and therefore principles of reason (or matter of fact) must be resorted to for its proper regulation. A thoughtful consideration of the whole subject may perhaps warrant the conclusion that (broadly speaking) man has advanced *less* in knowledge as to the proper mode of viewing the true principles that should regulate the ethical

feelings existing between the sexes—than in any other of those branches of knowledge which, in other respects, have raised him so far above the rest of the living world. This may be only the natural consequence of the neglect of intelligent discussion of the subject ; whereby matters are left mainly to the domination of custom established by the unthinking multitude.

Confusion worse confounded reigns in the minds of the majority as to this question. Apart from the servile control of custom (when the real causes for restraint are carefully concealed), an irrational and twaddling sentiment utterly disconnected from principle, and capable of being twisted round to all points of the compass at caprice, is (as may be fairly said) about all that regulates the conduct of a considerable portion of mankind. And in this respect the resemblance to the lower animals (in the absence of reasonable views) is very strong.

The principles of general conduct, grounded on the firm basis of natural science, have been so well elucidated by modern pioneers of knowledge, and are so widely known to well-educated persons, that it will be hardly necessary to do more than apply these principles to the particular case under consideration. The grand principle, which by



general consent of competent judges, includes everything relating to conduct (and therefore which must encircle the social relations of the sexes) may be stated to be substantially that—“Virtue” or “Duty” (so termed) consists in the practice of that conduct which is conducive to man's happiness or welfare in this life: that man should endeavour, therefore, to extract as much good as possible out of everything; and accordingly, that the object ought to be to derive the maximum of happiness out of the conditions provided by nature. The question therefore is, Is this practised in regard to the social relations of the sexes? It will probably be at once admitted that this is far from the case—in fact, that, in some respects, the existence of the two sexes, which ought to be a blessing, becomes a curse under the disorganized and confused ideas that exist as to the right method of viewing this subject. A cold and harsh distrust replaces what might often be a most desirable intimacy based upon mutual confidence, and an enlightened intelligence.

Knowing that the sensible portion of mankind (whose opinion is alone worth having) will approve and look with consideration on any honest attempt to improve knowledge or conduce

to progress, I will plunge without further hesitation into the groundwork of my subject.

In the history of progress, it is a perfectly well-known fact that when a deterrent or restraining power is (rightly or wrongly) believed to be wanted in society, and rational grounds for such restraint are not clearly defined; it is customary to invent fictitious\* ones, which, from their absence of foundation, invariably act as exactly the opposite of deterrents, and entail immense harm. Thus an attempt has been made to cause harmless sexual intimacy (admittedly harmless up to a certain point) to appear degrading, to infuse a false shame, which seems to be especially marked among the lower intelligence of mankind, and replaces what ought to be more worthy (or rational) grounds for due restraint and propriety. Probably (and this may appear a small matter at first sight) the absurd custom of concealing the truth, or inventing a fiction when a child asks its origin, may conduce to this feeling of false shame in regard to the sexual relations. For of course the child inevitably reasons that that which must be concealed by deceit, must be unfit to be told,

\* The monstrous fiction of *eternal* (or everlasting) punishment—that great insult to Divine justice—is a signal instance of this.

or degrading and vile, and therefore the real truth is afterwards discovered (as we know) with a kind of shock to the feelings, instead of being regarded as a perfectly fitting and obvious fact of nature. The unfortunate idea of the degrading thus produced by concealment or deceit, may cling to the child more or less throughout life, unless he has sufficient originality to eradicate by the light of reason the false impression thus early conveyed. We all know the extreme force of early impressions. This point is alluded to here, partly because its *seeming* insignificance has probably caused it to be unduly neglected.

If, instead of attempting to deter from any sexual intimacy, however harmless, in part by infusing a false shame (which intelligence afterwards indignantly revolts at), or by putting forward fictitious grounds as deterrents;—the real causes for keeping within a defined boundary were taught, and the evil consequences of abuse of privilege inculcated, while a harmless sociability within certain limits were rather commended as a good thing than condemned, there would surely be far more force created against wrong conduct than any degree of deception can infuse (which has only the exact opposite effect to that intended). So long as the individual knows *the reason why*, he