

**THE MAN AND THE
WOMAN: CHAPTERS
ON HUMAN LIFE**

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The Man and the Woman: Chapters on Human Life by Arthur L. Salmon

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ARTHUR L. SALMON

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1913

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Chapters on Human Life

BY
ARTHUR L. SALMON



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THE MAN AND THE WOMAN

CHAPTER I

DOES HE UNDERSTAND HER

DOES a man ever really understand the character of a woman?

It must be taken for granted that all understanding between man and woman is simply relative; there are degrees, but seldom completeness. When we recognize that we only partially know ourselves, that there are shades of character, moods, motives, sudden desires or antipathies or impulses which continually surprise us and evade our discrimination, we must see how impossible it is completely to know any other person. So many personalities seem grouped within the one individual, heredity so complicates matters with the ghosts of a thousand ancestors, that we only faintly apprehend our own characters and never come to a full comprehension. How much more so with the case of another.

But apart from the ordinary veil that conceals soul from soul, there is the other veil of sex. Sex is not a

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thing that is skin-deep; it does not merely rule form and function: it attaches to mind and emotions if not to the underlying spirit. The bare spiritual part, the true inner entity, may, indeed, know nothing of sex; take away mind and body, and there is still something that we recognize as deeper than these, the soul that is untouched by passing years. This inmost self may perhaps be independent of sex. But this is not the part with which we ever become familiar, even in our own selves, though it be really our truest self. The part of ourselves and of others that we know best is just the part that is most intimately affected by sex, the characteristics that make up our daily life, the thoughts and emotions and purposes of which our active personalities consist.

The old question of equality between the sexes need not be discussed; we may take it for granted that they are equal. We cannot take it for granted that they are similar. They are widely unlike, and any attempt to render them alike or to treat them alike must end in disaster. But that understanding which is impossible as a whole is possible in part. Perhaps there are no women whom all men can read, even superficially; but there are few women whom some man cannot know

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with tolerable accuracy. The feminine, so widely different from the male, may yet be apprehended and appreciated by the male.

Some of the best woman characters in fiction have been drawn by men. It almost seems, if one may dare to say so, that men draw women better in fiction than women draw men. Very seldom, indeed, do we find a true man drawn by a feminine pen—even George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë partly fail here; one finds some lack of reality in their heroes. Yet what lovely portraits of women have been given us by masculine novelists, or, if not always lovely, what living likenesses—by Balzac, Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, Thackeray, Meredith, Hawthorne, Hardy! Jane Austen's pictures of women are generally flawless in their accuracy; can we say as much of her men? If we collected a literary gallery of feminine portraits from the novelists, some of the most excellent would be the work of men; but if we collected a similar gallery of masculine portraits, how few of these could be taken from female writers!

It is clear, then, that, at least in the case of genius, man can read woman with a wonderful insight—always, of course, with the limitations that attach to our

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wonderfully elusive personality; and in the case of men who are not geniuses there may be the same enlightening sympathy, though without the gift of utterance. When a woman tells us laughingly that no man ever understands her, we may assent, but we might retaliate that there are other women equally worthy whom some men can in a measure comprehend. That which is best in womanhood has certainly been adequately seen and appraised by the man.

If a woman chooses that no man, nor any one else, should understand her, she can, of course, easily accomplish the feat of deceiving or eluding. Some women spend their lives in doing little else, and we may concede that off the stage a man is a clumsy actor, compared with a woman. To play a part comes naturally to the woman almost from infancy; a little girl assumes airs and graces and manners of which a boy knows nothing. There is no woman who cannot twist most men round her little finger—perhaps not all men, but most; there is no woman who cannot veil her identity, conceal her true feelings, or ape an emotion that she does not feel; the statement may sound sweeping, but exceptions are certainly insignificant.

To evade or foil or bewilder a man is usually child's