

**A SURVEY OF THE
WOMAN PROBLEM,
FROM THE GERMAN
OF ROSA MAYREDER**

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A Survey of the Woman Problem, from the German of Rosa Mayreder by Rosa Mayreder & Herman Scheffauer

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ROSA MAYREDER & HERMAN SCHEFFAUER

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PREFACE

IN this book I have dealt in my own way with the problems of the woman's movement. Although in some respects I am not in entire agreement with this movement, I regard it, nevertheless, as one of the phenomena which honourably distinguish the present epoch from all previous periods of human history; nay, more, it seems to me to be one of the finest manifestations of an epoch which otherwise, in its poverty of ideals, of noble feelings, and of passionate beliefs, betrays evidence of degeneration.

Many of the ideas contained in my work may frequently have been expressed before. The first outlines were made fifteen years ago, and certain experiences of my early youth gave me the initial impulse to write it. Those readers, however, who are already acquainted with the literature on the subject will, I hope, find enough that is new to compensate them for what is old; while that large majority which, unfortunately, still knows very little about the movement, must remain satisfied with the comprehensive view of it which I have endeavoured to present. Some of the essays have already appeared in various periodicals, and in stringing them together it has been impossible to avoid repeti-

tions. These will not vex the reader who recognises that certain truths cannot be repeated too often, since that which stands to reason does not necessarily compel belief, and that which is proved is not always admitted.

The woman's movement is due to three different causes, and has three different aims in view. In my opinion, these ought to be considered separately, however intimately they may be connected with one another, and however true it may be that, taken in conjunction with one another, they constitute the essential movement. Its threefold basis is economic, social, ethical-psychological.

During the few years in which the movement has begun to pass from the theoretical stage to the political, the economic and social problems have come to the front, while the ethical-psychological part has been kept in the background. I have, however, not dealt at all with the economic, and only slightly with the social, sides of the question. Although I recognise that without the economic revolution caused by the introduction of machinery the movement could hardly have become a practical one, yet I maintain that historically it has an idealistic, not a materialistic, origin. However great an influence the economic impulses may exert, much more importance is to be attached to the ideal postulates of the woman's movement. Economic improvements would have little effect in changing the real relations of the sexes. Even if a woman were able to gain her living independently of man, still she would not be free unless quite other influences began to operate in her favour.

The female sex will never, the old idealist Hippel to the contrary notwithstanding, be set on an equal footing

with the male merely as a result of "the magnanimity and sense of justice of man." Although, personally, I am absolutely convinced that these are the distinctive qualities of noble manhood, I still think that the world at large is moved by more elementary influences, and not by magnanimity or a sense of justice. That is true both of the ethical-psychological relations of the sexes and also of their relations in the economic affairs of life.

I mention this emphatically and at once in order to avoid the accusation that I have taken up the cudgels on behalf of the female sex against the male. Indeed, I have purposely avoided the question as to the superiority of one sex over the other. [An unprejudiced judgment could be given only by a person who belonged to neither sex. Speaking for myself alone, and as a mere matter of subjective taste, I would give the preference to the male sex, but that seems to be a prejudice naturally inherent in the female.]

To the majority of women as well as men, Kant's dictum on mankind in general will, unfortunately, apply all too well: "If you ask whether mankind is to be regarded as a good species or as a bad, I must confess that it has not much to boast about." Certainly, the ordinary woman has as little reason to boast as the ordinary man, and we ought to cease attempting to formulate any sweeping judgments about either sex as a whole. This method of generalisation is one of the vulgar mental habits of the present day which tend to confound the superior individual, the man who rises above the average, with the mass. The average man or woman, whether of the upper or of the middle class, is in no sense interesting, and the ordinary sex-characteristics do not make the study of either any more attrac-