

**ELLEN KEY: HER
LIFE AND
HER WORK**

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Ellen Key: her life and her work by Louise Nyström-Hamilton & A. E. B. Fries

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LOUISE NYSTRÖM-HAMILTON & A. E. B. FRIES

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Ellen Key

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY BECKER & MAÄSS, BERLIN.

Ellen Key

Her Life and Her Work

By

Louise Nyström-Hamilton

Authorised Translation from the Swedish by

A. E. B. Fries

With an Introduction by

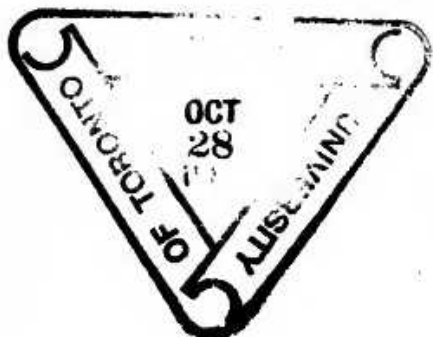
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INTRODUCTION

NOT a few among those who read Ellen Key's books and hear of her influence in the world, have desired to know more of her life than has yet been placed before the English reader. Such desire will be to some extent satisfied by this translation of the biography written by Mrs. Louise Nyström-Hamilton. It is simply, as the author herself states, a record of external events such as we may reasonably expect in the biography of a living person, without any attempt to estimate Ellen Key's work or even to propagandise her doctrines. The sketch is slight, but we can regard it as competent. Mrs. Nyström-Hamilton, who was independently acquainted with the Key family, has known Ellen Key for many years, and been associated with her work, for she is the wife of Dr. Anton Nyström, who founded the People's Institute at Stockholm where Ellen Key lectured for twenty years. She has also written several books on the sexual life (one of them

translated into English) which, though their scientific value has been disputed, are inspired throughout by a fine humanitarian zeal. What Mrs. Nyström-Hamilton has to tell may thus be received with confidence as coming out of the circle in which Ellen Key has spent the greater part of her active life. If she wisely refrains from any attempt at a final estimate of Ellen Key, she at all events assists us to form our own opinions.

Ellen Key has sometimes been called the modern St. Brigitta. That famous saint of the North came out of Sweden six hundred years ago to write her book of *Revelations* and to attempt the moral reformation of her age. To-day, with a similar spontaneous energy, a similar self-inspired vocation, Ellen Key comes to us out of Sweden to preach a moral reformation of a somewhat different kind. Her message has not been the outcome of historical study or of sociological investigation. Notwithstanding the wide and miscellaneous culture which circumstance and an eagerly receptive brain enabled her to acquire, her temperamental activities have throughout been of a rich and impulsive rather than of a scientific and methodical character. Her attitude has been the outcome of deep

natural instinct, so that when in 1895, at the request of the Committee of the Women's Exhibition in Copenhagen, she first entered the field in which she was to become so famous, by delivering a lecture on the "Misused Forces of Womanhood," her ideas seemed to herself so much matter of course, mere commonplace truths which all developed women must hold, that she experienced some difficulty in giving expression to them. It was not until protests and even attacks followed the delivery and publication of this lecture that she realised that here was her mission and that the world had need of her message.

To-day, Ellen Key stands at that point in the Woman Movement where growth is most vital and the conflict of opinions most acute. It is quite easy to display resentment towards Ellen Key, and to cast ridicule on her work; the one and the other have been done even by people who have themselves played a highly honourable part in the Woman Movement. But there can be no denying that Ellen Key is intensely alive, acutely sensitive to all the best influences of her time, and throughout, in her weakness and in her strength, a thorough and essential woman.

Her receptive intelligence has enabled her woman's intuition to grasp the nature of the problem with which Feminism has to grapple. Here, at the spot where she stands, the nature and direction of the Woman's Movement of the future must be determined. That alone suffices to make the study of her work indispensable.

No doubt, Ellen Key's attitude must be at first disconcerting, and not to one party only in this question but also to the other. There, on the one hand, has been the party which insistently declared: Woman is the Mother, and the Home is her sphere; by going outside her sphere, by competing with men, and by seeking to do everything that is done by man, she becomes unfit for the work that she alone can do; she degrades herself and injures the race. There, on the other hand, is the party which, with equal or greater insistence, declares: Woman is a Human Being; Justice demands that she shall possess the same rights and privileges as Man and be free to lead the same life as Man. And between those two parties here comes Ellen Key with her declaration: Yes, Woman is the Mother, the future of the race is in her hands, and woman is a Human