

**MODERN WOMEN; AN ENGLISH
RENDERING OF
LAURA MARHOLM HANSSON'S
'DAS BUCH DER FRAUEN'**

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Modern women; an English rendering of Laura Marholm Hansson's 'Das buch der frauen' by
Hermione Ramsden

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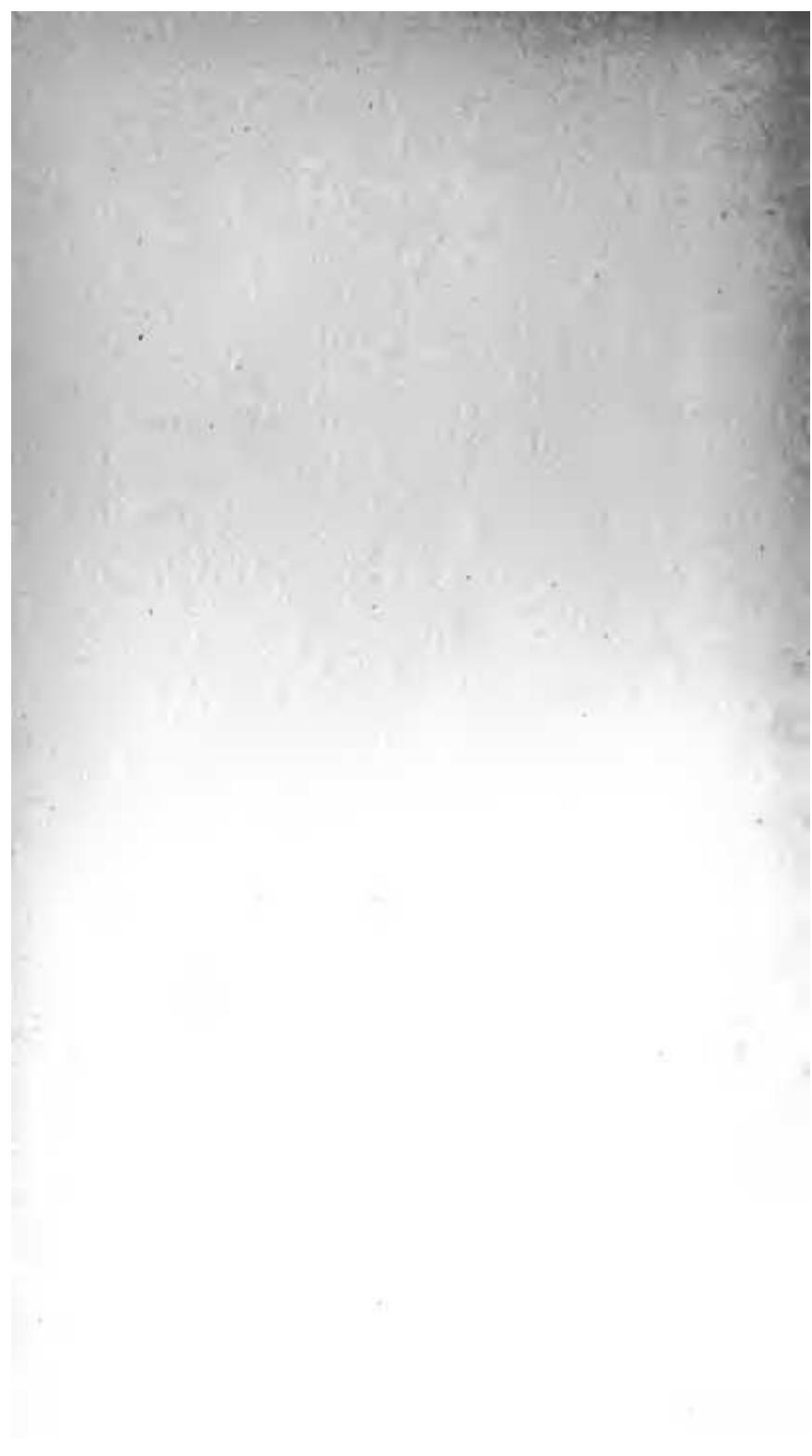
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HERMIONE RAMSDEN

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Modern Women



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INTRODUCTION

THE subjects of these six psychological sketches are well-known to English readers, with the exception of Amalie Skram, the Norwegian novelist, and Fru Leffler, who is known only as the biographer of Sonia Kovalevsky.

Laura Marholm, the writer of this book, is a German authoress of Norwegian extraction, who is celebrated for her literary criticisms and the beauty of her style. In September 1889, she married Ola Hansson, the Swedish author of "Sensitiva Amorosa," "Young Scandinavia," and a novel called "Fru Esther Bruce," in which the heroine is said to bear a strong resemblance to Eleonora Duse. He has also published a volume of prose poems, called "Ofeg's Ditties," which has been translated by George Egerton, whose vivid style and powerful descriptions have gained a place for her among the foremost women writers of the day.

Laura Marholm was the first to introduce her husband to the German public by means of two articles in the *Neue Freie Presse*. The first, called "A Swedish Love Poet," appeared May 24th, 1888, before they had met, and was written

in praise of his early work, "Sensitiva Amorosa." The second article was a criticism on "Pariahs," and it is an interesting fact that in it she compares him to Gottfried Keller.

In all her writings, Laura Marholm looks at life through the spectacles of a happy marriage; she believes that matured thought and widened views can—in a woman's case—be only the direct result of marriage, and consequently she considers marriage to be absolutely indispensable to every woman, and that without it she is both mentally and morally undeveloped. She has little sympathy with the Woman's Rights movement, judged either from the social, political, or educational point of view; with regard to the latter, she has not had an university education herself, and she is not at all impressed by those who have. She considers that a woman's individuality is of greater importance than her actions; she upholds woman's influence *as woman*, and has no sympathy with the advanced thinkers, who, with Stuart Mill at their head, would fain have women exert their influence as thinking, reasoning human beings, believing all other influence to be unworthy the dignity of the modern woman. Laura Marholm has the intuitive faculty, and this enables her to gauge the feelings of those women who spend a long youth in waiting—who are taught to believe, and who do believe, that their youth is nothing more than a transition period between childhood

and marriage. Women who grow old in waiting, and awake to reality to find behind them nothing but a wasted youth, and in the future—an empty old age. But these are not modern women, they are the women of the *ancien régime*, who have missed their vocation, and failed to attain their sole object in life—viz., marriage. On the one hand we are confronted with the old-fashioned girl, on the other by the new woman. Of the two, we prefer the new woman, and while recognising her mistakes, and lamenting her exaggerated views, Laura Marholm acknowledges that she is formed of the best material of the age, and prophesies for her a brighter future. But her views differ greatly from those of Ibsen and Björnson. According to Ibsen, a woman is first of all a human being, and then a woman; she places the woman first, the human being last. Björnson believes that an intellectually developed woman with a life-work can get on very well by herself; Laura Marholm maintains that, apart from man, a woman is nothing. According to her, woman is a creature of instinct, and this instinct is her most precious possession, and of far greater value than the intellect. Of all the studies in this book, Fru Leffler is probably the one with whom she is least in sympathy. Fru Leffler was essentially intellectual, possessed of a somewhat cold and critical temperament, and in writing the biography of Sonia Kovalevsky she was often unable to appreciate the latter's very