

THE ASCENT OF WOMAN

OR

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE LIFE OF OTHERS



LAURA M. WHITE

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BY

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WITH A PREFACE BY BISHOP BASHFORD

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INTRODUCTION

This essay was written in answer to a request from the Christian Literature Society, and was translated into Chinese by Mr. Liu King Hsü in 1911.

The first half was afterwards divided into two chapters and, slightly condensed, given in the November and December numbers of the *Nü To Pao* in 1912. The material in Chapter I. was mainly derived from the "Ascent of Man," especially that beautiful chapter, the "*Evolution of a Mother.*" Consequently that title was borrowed and the article accredited to Professor Drummond. Chapter II, under the heading "From Eve to Mary," was used in the Christmas issue of the magazine.

The latter half of this essay has been revised to bring it up to date, and the whole published in English with the hope that it may be helpful to the awakening women of China.

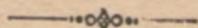
L. M. W.

PREFACE

I heartily commend Miss White's attempt to give a theistic interpretation of evolution as applied to women and to guide the young womanhood of China to the Christian conception of duty. Miss White has ample scientific warrant for her attempt in the examples of Drummond and Benjamin Kidd in Great Britain, of Professor Kessler and Prince Kropotkin in Russia, and Espinas and Lanessan in France. Even those who differ from her account of the advance of woman, nevertheless, will appreciate her effort to lead the young women of China into the path of service—the path of Christian devotion to the interests of the home, of the children, and of the church. Some who have been too busy in service to watch the progress of modern thought or to become familiar with the accepted results of science may regard evolution as a radical and dangerous heresy and Miss White's recognition of it as dangerous. But with the inevitable progress of years Miss White's work in this regard is sure of clear recognition in the not distant future as both constructive and conservative.

J. W. BASHFORD.

The Struggle for the Life of Others.



“It does move, after all,” whispered Galileo under his breath. He referred to the rotary motion of the earth from west to east. But there is a greater movement—an uplift from the low to the high, up the rungs of a Ladder of Love leading into the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The first rungs of the ladder were laid countless millenniums ago, when, by attraction and chemical affinity, two little atoms in the fiery rotating cloud-ball that then was our planet united, becoming stronger than the surrounding atoms. Gradually the first pair absorbed a third, a fourth, a fifth; and we had the first chemical family. Then a tribe of atoms was raised up conquering the surrounding units. Other family groups became radiating centres of power, and the

processes of attraction, readjustment, conflict, and repulsion continued, till the elements arranged themselves in the order of their densities; the mineral kingdom was finished, and God saw that it was good.

The ascent of the second rung of the ladder, extending through the vegetable kingdom, began when God endowed a tiny protoplasmic cell with the two activities that eternally divide it from the mineral kingdom—the joint activities of nutrition and reproduction, or as Professor Drummond says: “*The struggle for the life of self and the struggle for the life of others.*” The struggle for life commenced when the little protoplasmic cell called in matter from without and assimilated it for its own use. The struggle for the life of others, when it sacrificed itself to form another life. From the dawn of creation these two forces have acted together, the one looking to its own things; the other, to the things of others.

And it is the second, the female principle that is the prototype of all motherhood, of all altruism.

Watch the miracle of unselfishness in a little flower. One by one the petals of ministering beauty in which she has clothed herself droop, fade, and waste away. But, hidden in the heart of the dying flower mother, one finds a precious little casket of seeds that she gives the world at the cost of her own life. The human race practically lives on rice and wheat, and these world foods are all produced by the self-sacrificing activities of flowering plants. Man living on seeds, lives literally on self-sacrifice and love.

Stepping up another rung of the Ladder into the Animal Kingdom, we observe a long lesson taught by God, in which mere "femaleness" passes up gradually, until it is transformed into motherhood.

The first great change that the God of nature made in teaching love in the animal

kingdom was in diminishing the number of young produced at a time. Among fishes, for instance, the herring and cod produce a million ova. Now no mother can love a million, so nature set to work to reduce the number produced, to thousands; passing on to reptiles, to hundreds; to birds, ten or less; until in the highest, the mammalia, the rule is one. This bringing down of the number means the change of a diffused care for eggs to a concentrated love for offspring.

A second great change was in making the mother recognize and love her offspring. Embryos are not fair to see, so they were hidden within the egg or within the mother for weeks or months, and in the higher animals, the little one is not born till fair to see, and lovable.

A third change was in making the child helpless, dependent on the mother. In lower forms of animal life, the new little creature breaks through its tiny egg into independent

existence. It may never see its mother or it may ignore her, dashing away after its prey, a lawless little bandit. A gentler race was needed, and in the mammalia, nature set herself to the task of teaching the Fifth Commandment to the youth of the world. No young mammal can nourish itself. It must dwell with the mother, or die. And while the physical name of this compelling force is lactation, ethically, we may discover here the beginnings of tenderness and love.

The next effort of evolution is to prolong the period of infancy to give affection time in which to grow. Many little creatures stay with their mother a few days or weeks, and then can climb, eat, chatter, and are independent; while for many months the little baby is a mere sprawling ball of helplessness, teaching lessons of tenderness, patience, gentleness and sympathy which, in God's Providence, changed the course of evolution and determined the diviner destiny of the human race.

See then what the savage mother and her child have brought into the world! When she awoke to her first tenderness, forgetting self in sacrifice for her little one, it was God's hand upon woman helping her up the next rung of the Ladder of Love to *family life*.

And here the father comes in. For while to the woman was given the second and higher function, the *struggle for the life of others*, to man was mainly assigned the first,—the *struggle for life*. The story of the Evolution of a Father is not so beautiful as that of the mother. In the lower ranges of animal life, maternity was at a low level, but paternity practically non-existent. Nevertheless among a few invertebrates, the male parent took a slight interest in the care of eggs. Among birds, the parents unite in nest building and in caring for offspring. Stepping up into the Mammalia, the father becomes a backslider, indifferent or even hostile to his young.

Nevertheless higher up in the animal scale, God was able to introduce the idea of *protective fatherhood*. Children with fathers to fight for them grew up. The others were killed or starved. When man probably passed from the frugiferous to the carnivorous stage, he had more responsibility in providing his family with food. But the sight of fed and contented offspring must have given him some pleasure; and the cries of voracious little ones would impel him to further unselfish endeavor. As food provider he became head of the family. Father's smile or frown meant good or bad. The little ones endeavored to win his approval. This standard, low as it seems, was the beginning of good conduct, of proper manners. So if the gift of Love came through the mother, through the father was given the equally important blessing of Law.

Thus we see that just as in the Mineral Kingdom, the first chemical family brought

together by chemical attraction and affinity, made a nucleus strong enough for the foundation of our solid physical world, so in the Animal Kingdom, forces of kinship, protection, gratitude, brotherhood and tenderness working among the little humanized atoms, unite them into *families, the nucleus of the social and national life of the world.*

So far we have been living in the first chapter of Genesis. Only, one must remember that the term "day" does not necessarily mean a period of twenty-four hours, but a cycle, an eon of time. Passing into the second chapter, we have the inspired account of man's receiving a soul; God breathing into his nostrils His own divine breath, that man might become spiritual partaker of the eternal life of God. With this divine gift of a soul came self-consciousness, a realization of loneliness, and of the possibilities contained in poor Eve neglected at the back of the garden. She became bone of his

bone, flesh of his flesh. In their garden, so says the Bible, there was a tree which at that time they were forbidden to touch; the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The woman saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise. She tasted, and her eyes were opened.

George Matheson has pointed out that this story of Eve is, in parable, the life story of every woman. Moreover in the history of the sociological development of women, there are always the same three stages: First, the early period of naiveté, of innocence, of childhood's unreasoning obedience, before woman has begun to think. Second, a sudden awakening to the realization of her latent possibilities. Vanity, pride, and ambition are aroused as she eats from the 'Tree of Knowledge. Life becomes a struggle to develop and express her own personality. The third and important period comes with the realization that the meaning of her

God-given life is not the struggle for the development of self-life, but the *struggle for the life of others*.

Poor Eve entered on the learning of this lesson when driven in blessed punishment from an illusive Paradise to a real home in which she became the mother of all living; the type of universal motherhood. Personal dreams and ambitions were renounced in the God-given consciousness that by her children would the serpent's head be bruised. Through them, and by the stronger forces of gentleness, purity and love, would she conquer craft, subtlety and brute force.

Tracing this beautiful story of Eve in the history of woman's progress, the first period would include that extending from the dawn of civilization to the time of her awakening under Greek and Roman rule. Perhaps in the gray dawn of the world there may have been a golden age for women, with matriarchy prevailing. If so, it was

quickly followed by an iron age, in which the rule of conduct was:—

“Muscularly, I can, therefore morally I may.” The history of woman is largely the history of marriage; and in primitive society this tie was very loose, the woman being often fought for, stolen, or bartered. Her work was hardly differentiated from that of man, excepting that whilst the braves enjoyed the excitement of hunting and war, heavy drudgery was apt to fall on the woman. Nevertheless, as a savage, she had more freedom than when, a little higher up the social ladder, her sphere become definitely associated with the houses that gradually displaced caves and forest shelters. Little by little grew the idea that woman must be guarded by the men of the family until her marriage. And this was arranged by her parents, whether by purchase, or exchange of presents, but with no reference to the will of the bride.

Next we have the strongly knit patriarchal type of family life with which most civilized nations have started their history; the family cult and ancestor worship becoming the nucleus of stronger and larger social groups. But this family unity was secured at the expense of the last vestige of rights of women and children. Moreover, slavery began to flourish; for there is an evolution of evil as well as of good, and the development of the human race brings out the worst at each stage of civilization, as well as the germs of what is better. Again, whereas in primitive society monogamy often prevailed, probably because of poverty, as wealth and population increased, polygamy grew also; the rich and powerful indulging in large harems. Purity of woman was secured by seclusion. And unfaithfulness was punished by the husband, with whom were the issues of life and death. Woman was a chattel, a property, never a personality.

Semi-civilization is thus characterized:— Women are irresponsible. “It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor to do good.” They are still in that first period of their development, unthinking childlike obedience.

It was in Greece and in Rome that woman first tasted of the Tree of Knowledge and awoke to a dim realization of her latent capabilities. In these two countries, monogamy was the rule; and woman was regarded as a minor in law, not a chattel. Aristotle considered her as intermediate between slave and free man. Plato even argued for her admission to the duties and rights of man. Nevertheless, in conservative Athens, intelligence and education were considered a vice in women which put them under a social ban. And at the height of her glory, Athens presented the anomaly of a respectable illiterate class from which the mothers of future citizens were taken. The brilliant men of Athens did not see fit to have educated

wives and daughters. Were they therefore without the sympathy and influence of educated women? It may safely be said that no great thing in literature or art has ever been done without this inspiration. There was an educated class in Athens, the "*heterae*." These were intelligent, gifted, possessed of refined graceful manners; the advanced women of the day. Men praised the good ignorant women who stayed at home and would not break the bonds of tradition which decreed silence and ignorance. But they sought the society of clever ones who did none of these things. To the consequent corrupting influences of these gay and dissolute women, wise men trace a potent cause of Athenian decline.

The Roman temper was different. There are many instances in this country of women, who, retaining their virtue, rose to distinguished positions because of learning and ability. Divorce was unknown in early Rome,

but legally the wife had no rights. This system was felt to be harshly oppressive to women, and there came into use a kind of free marriage. Gradually the Roman matron became more her own mistress than the married women of any civilization down to the present generation. Following this freedom came a fearful decay of all that was noble and pure in womanly character. And the moral laxity of Roman women contributed not a little to the downfall of that great empire before the Germanic tribes.

The history of civilization, especially that of Greece and Rome, would seem to indicate that unless woman's liberty means service, not license; unless it is accompanied with moral regeneration, the bettering of her intellectual and social position, and the endowing her with political power may become a menace to the nation's life.

It was an humble Jewish woman whose voice in a despised part of the Roman

dominions rang out the Magna Charta of woman's rights:—

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” The history of women in every country, in every time, proves that only the daughters of Mary understand freedom. Only the strong hand of the Christ could break her chains, and guide woman's feet up the next rung of the ladder into His own Kingdom of Love; a Kingdom in which the dominating ideals of this world, wealth, glory, ambition, power, all are dethroned, that meekness, mercy, humility, patience, and purity may be exalted. In reversing former ideals of greatness, Jesus has magnified woman. The qualities once supposed to be merely feminine virtues have become the essential principles of his Kingdom.

This exalting of woman was followed by exaltation of that woman's service which had hitherto been her reproach. Motherhood

was enthroned. Christ had been born of a woman. Women became His most devoted servants. As Christian congregations were formed, to women were given important duties in the church. Epistles to them were written by the foremost apostles. And the Christian Church itself, in the inspired imagination of the beloved disciple, took the form of a woman, radiant, crowned, with the stars under her feet.

Thus, in the history of her progress, was woman called in a new ethical sense to that third period of her development; to the real function of her being—the *struggle for the life of others*. Moral ideals became higher. Greek women were transformed into saints, Roman matrons revelled in intensity of faith, until the heathen world exclaimed:—"What women these Christians have!" As women rose in moral power, legal restrictions were removed. The Christian church abolished polygamy. Moreover it held that the moral consequences

of violating the marriage law held equally with men as with women. Orphans, widows, slaves received the protection of the church. Even in the darkest of the dark ages, women as mothers, teachers, abbesses, and saints had eminence, the church putting women and men side by side in spiritual work. Beautiful legends grew around the holy lives of Saints Barbara, Cecilia, Elizabeth, Catherine, Lucy, Margaret, Ursula, and others, stimulating a new romantic reverence for woman. In the minds of men she seemed ethereal, or made of such fine texture that she must not come in contact with the soilure of the world. Chivalry demanded that she have a champion. Religion greatly modified the old conception of man's rights, while it emphasized the virtues of womanly patience, meekness, purity and gentleness. The church made the consent of the bride necessary in marriage which had become a religious, mystical rite, typical of the union of Christ and His church.

While the gift of *personality* came to woman through the early Christian church, under Protestantism has been evolved an appreciation of her *individuality*. Gradually the old worshipful spirit of chivalry is being displaced by new ideals. It is felt that she must be self-governing; free to develop every talent, to enter every door of service. Within the last hundred years, especially in America, there have been certain interesting tendencies in regard to woman's education and spheres of influence.

At first the pioneers who blazed the trail for woman's higher education insisted that it must be "with an enlightened regard to the different wants of the sexes." The first educators made their plea that the girl be trained as housekeeper or teacher. Emma Willard set forth the theory that housewifery might profitably be made a science. Little by little it was proved that a girl's education need not be different from a boy's. And in the

latter part of the nineteenth century, it was the pride of the woman graduate that her Alma Mater had the same requirements for entrance, the same courses of study, and the same standards for graduation as her brother's college. At the present time in America they are going back to the old idea of differentiation. It has already been proved that she can do the same kind of work. Now the contention is, a woman's course of study has a right to be different.

What has caused this apparent revolution in sentiment? Within the last twenty years certain subjects such as the Home, Child Study, and Altruism have been raised to the dignity of sciences now recognized as of paramount importance to the nation's very life. It is also believed that in Woman's education she should specialize along these lines and thus be prepared to solve the many problems connected with woman's trinity of service—the Home, the Child, and Altruistic Work.

Is it not possible that these experiences of the oldest Republic are worthy the attention of the youngest? What is the present outlook of China's daughters? For two millenniums they lingered in the prolonged childhood of their first period of development. Now they are eagerly reaching for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which they desire to make them appear wise. They want to study books the very titles of which are polysyllabic mouthfuls of erudition;—on jurisprudence, higher mathematics, political sciences, etcetera.

The facts of government, of politics, the technical knowledge of physics needed by an engineer, and higher mathematics—while not foreign to woman's activities—are at least secondary. But the problems of the house and household, of food and clothing have been for her to work out ever since she made the first skin tent; cradled the first child; built the first fire; fashioned the first cooking vessel;

ever since "Adam delved and Eve span." For the woman nothing can be more essential to her cultural education than the knowledge of the relation of food, shelter, clothing to the world of past, present and future needs.

Unfortunately the new Chinese woman is not eager for this kind of practical education. She desires instead to study whatever a man studies. Her greatest ambition is to go abroad. What she does not want, but what she must learn, is to reign over that little Kingdom in which she has been too long immured and from which she now wants to escape, the *Kingdom of Home*.

The sin of Eve consisted in desiring the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge from wrong motives: pride, vanity, ambition. Her awakened impulses like those of her daughters in Greece and Rome were essentially selfish. They too coveted learning, fame, liberty, not knowing that freedom is from

within; that only as woman changes her desires from the earthly to the heavenly, as the Eve is transformed into the Mary, can Truth make her free for service. Power and freedom seem glorious gifts, but are dangerous unless safeguarded by goodness and a desire to serve.

We believe that China's daughters are nobler and stronger than those of Greece and Rome, and that they have already entered on that third period of woman's develop—the *struggle for the life of others*. Events of the last two years show the perfect passion they have for patriotism and self-sacrifice, but also go to prove that this spirit would better be diverted from government enterprises into the safer channels of service recommended by western nations to their women—the *Home, the Child, and Altruism*.

First the *Home*. Is there a needier field? Foreigners have only admiration for the wonderful fabrics woven by the cunning

hand of the Chinese artisan. Western agricultural experts come to China to learn the methods of the untiring Chinese farmer in his orderly and beautifully terraced fields. Western scholars desire to study Chinese philosophy and literature. But so far, what contribution has the Chinese woman made to society? Would any one seriously-minded advise foreign experts to come to the East to learn from Chinese women their methods of Home-culture and mother-craft?

The reason for this inefficiency is not hard to trace. Until within the last few years woman in China was a pretty toy, a despised drudge painfully hobbling along, or perhaps, merely a machine for producing sons. But a new era has dawned. And just as Dante measured his advance in Paradise not by consciousness of ascent but by the ever growing loveliness of Beatrice, so China would best count her steps of progress not by wealth, railroad, or industrial develop-

ment, but by the new graces and beauties, mental and spiritual, glorifying the faces of her rising daughters.

In the renaissance of northern Europe two comparatively insignificant improvements largely influenced the uplift of the home life: the introduction of *chimneys* into the houses of peasants, and of *spices* brought from the East as a result of the Crusades.

The peasant's bill of fare was no longer,—

“Pease porridge hot
 Pease porridge cold
 Pease porridge in the pot
 Nine days old—”

and it was no longer prepared in enormous quantities at a cook-house of the feudal lord to meet the needs of nine days, but over the peasant's own fireplace, and seasoned by the spices his wife learned to throw into the porridge pot. Home commenced to grow comfortable; its joys became a little dearer than roystering with other peasants. The

women realized their opportunity and made home even more comfortable. Thus a mediæval germ blossomed into the beautiful Teutonic home life.

Some knowledge on the subject of chimneys, drains, and hygiene might work reforms in our new China more important than those wrought for the mediæval serfs of Europe. Then why not give it in our school courses? Every piece of furniture in the home, the stove, crockery, the spoon, the very curves of tables and chairs have their history in the development of civilization more interesting than that of the chimney—if we but know it. Each piece of porcelain, every picture and ornament is related to the history of æsthetics and art. Why not make the scientific study of the home, and of æsthetics, part of the schoolgirl's course? Each piece of cloth links us to the world of botany, of zoology. And surely the venerable and beautiful arts of weaving, sewing, em-

broidery, are worthy of a place in our girls' schools. Yet girls who can play a Beethoven Sonata with nimble fingers call in the tailor for each new dress. "We are afraid to make it by ourselves. None of us girls can cut and fit a collar."

The study of foods leads us into the kingdom of plants and of animals. It also connects with the chemistry of the kitchen and with certain laws in social and home economics. Even a cup of tea, as Prof. Münsterberg points out, to the trained mind is linked with a thousand interests. The cup itself is part of the chemistry of porcelain and history of pottery. The tea is related to the history of the plant, to the chemistry of its preparation, and the hygiene of its effect on the nervous system. A woman cannot take from her school a nobler gift than the power of looking at her home from this wider cultural view-point which "makes drudgery divine."

More important even than studying scientifically how to make Chinese homes comfortable and elegant, is preparation for that great contest which must be waged against germs disease and animal parasites of China. In the West deadly epidemics of cholera, yellow fever, diphtheria, etc., are a thing of the past. Foreigners have learned to cope with malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis by science and sanitation. Why not give a thorough course of hygiene along these lines to the girls in our Chinese schools? Moreover, could we follow a better example than that of those state colleges in America that make of *mother-craft* a science and add it to the curricula? The students receive instruction by specialists on the functions of their own bodies. They study the development of the life and mind of a child, learn of pre-natal influence. They experiment in handling and bathing an infant, in bandaging wounds, dealing with emergencies and other

necessary work that a mother is called on to perform.

Again, the *child*. China needs women to make sympathetic, scientific, and reverent study of little children. We need to convince the future mothers and teachers of China that a child's character is formed, not by making him sit still while an adult scolds and preaches at him; that his education consists, not in hedging him around by prohibitions, and then injecting knowledge into him, but in his learning to think for himself; to conquer himself; and to live out to the world the truth God has already lived into him. *The school and the home are for the child, not the child for the school and the home.*

Last of all, *Altruism*.

China needs consecrated Chinese women trained to independent thinking, educated along the lines of Domestic Science and Social Psychology, *to make of altruism a science*, studying how to save the women of

China. And their salvation means more than in enabling them to go to Heaven after these wretched dwarfed lives are over. It includes a present salvation, physical, mental, and spiritual, from disease, weakness, ignorance and inefficiency into enlightened service and struggle for the lives of others.

But how? By first having leaders living and glowing with the life of Christ, who will give out Christianity, *not as a doctrine to be taught, but as a new life to be lived—the Life of God in the human soul.*

So into this ferment of good and evil, into our new China we want to send this message to the awakening women:—that ease and wealth do not necessarily mean good, nor toil and pain ill. The spirit of womanhood, of motherhood is not of ambition, but of sacrificial service. It prompts to raise, rather than to rise.

“ To give, not take.
To serve, not rule; to nourish, not devour,
To help, not crush. If need, to die, not live.”