

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle
Baum Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
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Men, Women, and Gods And Other Lectures

Helen H. (Helen Hamilton) Gardener

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MEN, WOMEN, AND GODS,

AND

OTHER LECTURES.

By Helen H. Gardener.

With An Introduction By Robert G. Ingersoll.

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THIS LITTLE VOLUME

is

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
WITH THE LOVE OF THE AUTHOR, TO
MRS. EVA INGERSOLL,
THE BRAVE, HAPPY WIFE OF AMERICA'S GREATEST ORATOR,
AND WOMAN'S TRUEST FRIEND.
IN HER BEAUTIFUL HOME-LIFE SUPERSTITION AND FEAR
HAVE NEVER
ENTERED; HUMAN EQUALITY AND FREEDOM HAVE
THEIR HIGHEST ILLUSTRATION;
AND
TIME HAS DEEPENED YOUTHFUL LOVE INTO A DIVINER
WORSHIP
THAN ANGELS OFFER OR THAN GODS INSPIRE.

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OCTOBER, 1885.

INTRODUCTION.

Nothing gives me more pleasure, nothing gives greater promise for the future, than the fact that woman is achieving intellectual and physical liberty. It is refreshing to know that here, in our country, there are thousands of women who think and express their own thoughts—who are thoroughly free and thoroughly conscientious—who have neither been narrowed nor corrupted by a heartless creed—who do not worship a being in heaven whom they would shudderingly loathe on earth. Women who do not stand before the altar of a cruel faith with downcast eyes of timid acquiescence, and pay to impudent authority the tribute of a thoughtless yes. They are no longer satisfied with being told. They examine for themselves. They have ceased to be the prisoners of society—the satisfied serfs of husbands or the echoes of priests. They demand the rights that naturally belong to intelligent human beings. If wives, they wish to be the equals of husbands—if mothers, they wish to rear their children in the atmosphere of love, liberty and philosophy. They believe that woman can discharge all her duties without the aid of superstition, and preserve all that is true, pure and tender without sacrificing in the temple of absurdity the convictions of the soul.

Woman is not the intellectual inferior of man. She has lacked—not mind—but opportunity. In the long night of barbarism physical strength, and the cruelty to use it, were the badges of superiority. Muscle was more than mind. In the ignorant age of Faith the loving nature of woman was abused, her conscience was rendered morbid and diseased. It might almost be said that she was betrayed by her own virtues. At best, she secured, not opportunity, but flattery, the preface to degradation. She was deprived of liberty and without that nothing is worth the having. She was taught to obey without question, and to believe without thought. There were universities for men before the alphabet had been taught to woman. At the intellectual feast there were no places for wives and mothers. Even now they sit at the second table and eat the crusts and crumbs. The schools for women, at the present time, are just far enough behind those for men to fall heirs to the discarded. On the same principle, when a doctrine becomes too absurd for the pulpit, it is given to the Sunday School. The ages of muscle and miracle—of fists and faith—

are passing away. Minerva occupies at last a higher niche than Hercules. Now, a word is stronger than a blow.

At last we see women who depend upon themselves— who stand self-poised the shocks of this sad world without leaning for support against a church— who do not go to the literature of barbarism for consolation, nor use the falsehoods and mistakes of the past for the foundation of their hope— women brave enough and tender enough to meet and bear the facts and fortunes of this world.

The men who declare that woman is the intellectual inferior of man, do not, and cannot, by offering themselves in evidence, substantiate their declaration.

Yet, I must admit that there are thousands of wives who still have faith in the saving power of superstition— who still insist on attending church while husbands prefer the shores, the woods, or the fields. In this way families are divided. Parents grow apart, and unconsciously the pearl of greatest price is thrown away. The wife ceases to be the intellectual companion of the husband. She reads the "Christian Register," sermons in the Monday papers, and a little gossip about folks and fashions, while he studies the works of Darwin, Haeckel and Humboldt. Their sympathies become estranged. They are no longer mental friends. The husband smiles at the follies of the wife and she weeps for the supposed sins of the husband. Such wives should read this book. They should not be satisfied to remain forever in the cradle of thought, amused with the toys of superstition.

The parasite of woman is the priest.

It must also be admitted that there are thousands of men who believe that superstition is good for women and children— who regard falsehood as the fortress of virtue, and feel indebted to ignorance for the purity of daughters and the fidelity of wives. These men think of priests as detectives in disguise, and regard God as a policeman who prevents elopements. Their opinions about religion are as correct as their estimate of woman.

The church furnishes but little food for the mind. People of intelligence are growing tired of the platitudes of the pulpit—the itera-

tions of the itinerants. The average sermon is "as tedious as a twice-told tale vexing the ears of a drowsy man."

One Sunday a gentleman who is a great inventor called at my house. Only a few words had passed between us, when he arose, saying that he must go as it was time for church. Wondering that a man of his mental wealth could enjoy the intellectual poverty of the pulpit, I asked for an explanation, and he gave me the following: "You know that I am an inventor. Well, the moment my mind becomes absorbed in some difficult problem, I am afraid that something may happen to distract my attention. Now, I know that I can sit in church for an hour without the slightest danger of having the current of my thought disturbed."

Most women cling to the Bible because they have been taught that to give up that book is to give up all hope of another life—of ever meeting again the loved and lost. They have also been taught that the Bible is their friend, their defender, and the real civilizer of man.

Now if they will only read this book—these three lectures, without fear, and then read the Bible, they will see that the truth or falsity of the dogma of inspiration has nothing to do with the question of immortality. Certainly the Old Testament does not teach us that there is another life, and upon that question, even the New is obscure and vague. The hunger of the heart finds only a few small and scattered crumbs. There is nothing definite, solid, and satisfying. United with the idea of immortality we find the absurdity of the resurrection. A prophecy that depends for its fulfillment upon an impossibility, cannot satisfy the brain or heart.

There are but few who do not long for a dawn beyond the night. And this longing is born of, and nourished by, the heart. Love wrapped in shadow—bending with tear-filled eyes above its dead, convulsively clasps the outstretched hand of hope.

I had the pleasure of introducing Helen H. Gardener to her first audience, and in that introduction said a few words that I will repeat,

"We do not know, we can not say whether death is a wall or a door, the beginning or end of a day, the spreading of pinions to

soar, or the folding forever of wings. The rise or the set of a sun, of an endless life that brings rapture and love to every one.

"Under the seven-hued arch of hope let the dead sleep."

They will also discover, as they read the "Sacred Volume," that it is not the friend of woman. They will find that the writers of that book, for the most part, speak of woman as a poor beast of burden—a serf, a drudge, a kind of necessary evil—as mere property. Surely a book that upholds polygamy is not the friend of wife and mother.

Even Christ did not place woman on an equality with man. He said not one word about the sacredness of home, the duties of the husband to the wife—nothing calculated to lighten the hearts of those who bear the saddest burdens of this life.

They will also find that the Bible has not civilized mankind. A book that establishes and defends slavery and wanton war is not calculated to soften the hearts of those who believe implicitly that it is the work of God. A book that not only permits, but commands religious persecution, has not in my judgment developed the affectional nature of man. Its influence has been bad and bad only. It has filled the world with bitterness, revenge, and crime, and retarded in countless ways the progress of our race.

The writer of this little volume has read the Bible with open eyes. The mist of sentimentality has not clouded her vision.

She has had the courage to tell the result of her investigations. She has been quick to discover contradictions. She appreciates the humorous side of the stupidly solemn. Her heart protests against the cruel, and her brain rejects the childish, the unnatural, and absurd. There is no misunderstanding between her head and heart. She says what she thinks, and feels what she says.

No human being can answer her arguments. There is no answer. All the priests in the world cannot explain away her objections. There is no explanation. They should remain dumb, unless they can show that the impossible is the probable—that slavery is better than freedom—that polygamy is the friend of woman—that the innocent can justly suffer for the guilty, and that to persecute for opinion's sake is an act of love and worship.

Wives who cease to learn—who simply forget and believe, will fill the evening of their lives with barren sighs and bitter tears. The mind should outlast youth.

If, when beauty fades, Thought, the deft and unseen sculptor, hath not left his subtle lines upon the face, then all is lost. No charm is left. The light is out. There is no flame within to glorify the wrinkled clay.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

Hoffman House,
New York, July 22, 1885.

MEN, WOMEN, AND GODS.

IT is thought strange and particularly shocking by some persons for a woman to question the absolute correctness of the Bible. She is supposed to be able to go through this world with her eyes shut, and her mouth open wide enough to swallow Jonah and the Garden of Eden without making a wry face. It is usually recounted as one of her most beautiful traits of character that she has faith sufficient to float the Ark without inspecting the animals.

So it is thought strange that a woman should object to any of the teachings of the Patriarchs. I claim, however, that if she honestly thinks there is anything wrong about them, she has a right to say so. I claim that I have a right to offer my objections to the Bible from the standpoint of a woman. I think that it is fair, at least, to put the case before you as it looks to me, using the Bible itself as my chief witness. That Book I think degrades and belittles women, and I claim the right to say why I think so. The opposite opinion has been stated by hundreds of people, hundreds of times, for hundreds of years, so that it is only fair that I be allowed to bring in a minority report.

Women have for a long time been asking for the right to an education, for the right to live on an equal footing with their brothers, and for the right to earn money honestly; while at the same time

they have supported a book and a religion which hold them as the inferiors of their sons and as objects of contempt and degradation with Jehovah. They have sustained a so-called "revelation" which holds them as inferior and unclean things. Now it has always seemed to me that these women are trying to stand on both sides of the fence at the same time—and that neither foot touches.

I think they are making a mistake. I think they are making a mistake to sustain any religion which is based upon faith. Even though a religion claim a superhuman origin—and I believe they all claim that—it must be tested by human reason, and if our highest moral sentiments revolt at any of its dictates, its dictates must go. For the only good thing about any religion is its morality, and morality has nothing to do with faith. The one has to do with right actions in this world; the other with unknown quantities in the next. The one is a necessity of Time; the other a dream of Eternity. Morality depends upon universal evolution; Faith upon special "revelation;" and no woman can afford to accept any "revelation" that has yet been offered to this world.

That Moses or Confucius, Mohammed or Paul, Abraham or Brigham Young asserts that his particular dogma came directly from God, and that it was a personal communication to either or all of these favored individuals, is a fact that can have no power over us unless their teachings are in harmony with our highest thought, our noblest purpose, and our purest conception of life. Which of them can bear the test? Not one "revelation" known to man to-day can look in the face of the nineteenth century and say, "I am parallel with your richest development; I still lead your highest thought; none of my teachings shock your sense of justice." Not one.

It is faith in "revelation" that makes a mother tear from her arms a tender, helpless child and throw it in the Ganges—to appease the gods! It is a religion of faith that teaches the despicable principle of caste—and that religion was invented by those who profited by caste. It was our religion of faith that sustained the institution of slavery—and it had for its originators dealers in human flesh. It is the Mormon's religion of faith, his belief in the Bible and in the wisdom of Solomon and David, that enables the monster of polygamy

to flaunt its power and its filth in the face of the morality of the nineteenth century, which has outgrown the Jehovah of the Jews.

Every religion must be tried at the bar of human justice, and stand or fall by the verdict there. It has no right to crouch behind the theory of "inspiration" and demand immunity from criticism; and yet that is just what every one of them does. They all claim that we have no right to use our reason on their inventions. But evil cannot be made good by revelation, and good cannot be made evil by persecution.

A "revelation" that teaches us to trample on purity, or bids us despise beauty – that gives power to vice or crushes the weak – is an evil. The dogma that leads us to ignore our humanity, that asks us to throw away our pleasures, that tells us to be miserable here in order that we may be happy hereafter, is a doctrine built upon a false philosophy, cruel in its premises and false in its promises. And the religion that teaches us that believing Vice is holier than unbelieving Virtue is a grievous wrong. Credulity is not a substitute for morality. Belief is not a question of right or wrong, it is a question of mental organization. Man cannot believe what he will, he must believe what he must. If his brain tells him one thing and his catechism tells him another, his brain ought to win. You don't leave your umbrella at home during a storm, simply because the almanac calls for a clear day.

A religion that teaches a mother that she can be happy in heaven, with her children in hell – in everlasting torment – strikes at the very roots of family affection. It makes the human heart a stone. Love that means no more than that, is not love at all. No heart that has ever loved can see the object of its affection in pain and itself be happy. The thing is impossible. Any religion that can make that possible is more to be dreaded than war or famine or pestilence or death. It would eat out all that is great and beautiful and good in this life. It would make life a mockery and love a curse.

I once knew a case myself, where an eldest son who was an unbeliever died. He had been a kind son and a good man. He had shielded his widowed mother from every hardship. He had tried to lighten her pain and relieve her loneliness. He had worked early and late to keep her comfortable and happy. When he died she was

heartbroken. It seemed to her more than she could bear. As she sat and gazed at his dear face in a transport of grief, the door opened and her preacher came in to bring her the comfort of religion. He talked with her of her loss, and finally he said, "But it would not be so hard for you to bear if he had been a Christian. If he had accepted what was freely offered him you would one day see him again. But he chose his path, he denied his Lord, and he is lost. And now, dear madam, place your affections on your living son, who is, thank God, saved." That was the comfort he brought her. That was the consolation of his religion. I am telling you of an actual occurrence. This is all a fact. Well, a few years later that dear old lady died in her son's house, where she had gone on a visit. He broke her will—this son who was saved—and brought in a bill against her estate for her board and nursing while she was ill! Which one of those boys do you think would be the best company for her in the next world?

It has always seemed to me that I would rather go to hell with a good son than to heaven with a good Christian. I may be wrong, but with my present light that is the way it looks to me; and for the sake of humanity I am glad that it looks that way.

ACCIDENT INSURANCE.

A church member said to me some time ago that even though the Bible were not "the word of God," even though it were not necessary to believe in the creed in order to go to heaven, it could not do any harm to believe it; and he thought it was "best to be on the safe side, for," said he, "suppose after all it should happen to be true!"

So he carries a church-membership as a sort of accident insurance policy.

I do not believe we have a right to work upon that basis. It is not honest. I do not believe that any "suppose it should be" gives us the right to teach "I know that it is." I do not believe in the honesty and right of any cause that has to prop up its backbone with faith, and splinter its legs with ignorance. I do not believe in the harmlessness of any teaching that is not based upon reason, justice, and truth. I do

not believe that it is harmless to uphold any religion that is not noble and elevating in itself. I do not believe that it is "just as well" to spread any dogma that stultifies reason and ignores common-sense. I do not believe that it is ever well to compromise with dishonesty and pretence. And I cannot admit that it "can do no harm" to teach a belief in the goodness of a God who sends an Emerson or a Darwin to hell because Eve was fond of fruit, and who offers a reserved seat in heaven to Christine Cox because a mob murdered Jesus Christ. It does not seem to me good morals, and it is certainly poor logic.

And speaking of logic, I heard a funny story the other day about one of those absurdly literal little girls who, when she heard people say they "wanted to be an angel," did not know it was a joke.. She thought it was all honor-bright. She was standing by the window killing flies, and her mother called her and said, "My child, don't you know that is very wicked? Don't you know that God made those dear little flies, and that he loves them?" (Just imagine an infinite God in love with a blue-bottle fly!) Well, the little girl thought that was queer taste, but she was sorry, and said that she would not do it any more. By and by, however, a great lazy fly was too tempting, and her plump little finger began to follow him around slowly on the glass, and she said, "Oh you nice big fly, did god made you? And does god love you? And does you love god?" (Down came the finger.) *"Well, you shall see him."*

Yet we all know Christians who love God better than anything else—"with all their hearts and soul and strength"—who prefer to postpone seeing him till the very last minute. They say it is because they have not "fulfilled their allotted time." Why not be honest and say it is because they like to live? They "long to put on immortality;" but their sleep is sounder if they live next door to a good doctor.

People say that men are infidels because it is easier—to rid themselves of responsibility. But it seems to me that anyone who advances the doctrine of "morality and works" instead of that of "repentance and faith," on the ground that it is easier, is laboring under a mistake. I don't see how any one could ask for an easier way of getting rid of his sins than the plan that simply unloads them on to another man. I fail to see anything hard about that—except for the man who catches the load; and I am unable to see anything com-

mendable about it either. But it is not always easy for a man to be brave enough to be responsible for his own mistakes or faults. It is not always easy for a man to say "I did it, and I will suffer the penalty." That is not always easy, but it is always just. No one but a coward or a knave needs to shift his personal responsibility on to the shoulders of the dead. Honest men and women do not need to put "Providence" up between themselves and their own motives.

A short time ago the wife of a very devout man apparently died, but her body remained so lifelike and her color so natural that her relatives decided that she could not be dead, and they summoned a physician. The husband, however, refused to have him administer any restoratives. He said that if the Lord had permitted her to go into a trance and was anxious to bring her out alive he would do it. Meanwhile he did not intend to meddle with Providence. His maxim was, "Whatever else you do, don't interfere with Providence. Give Providence a good chance and if it doesn't come round all right for Betsy, I think I can bear it—and she will have to."

If we take care of our motives toward each other, "Providence" will take care of itself.

Did you ever know a pious man do a real mean thing—that succeeded—who did not claim that Providence had a finger in it? The smaller the trick, the bigger the finger. He is perfectly honest in his belief too. He is the sort of man that never has a doubt about hell—and that most people go there. Thinks they all deserve it. Has entire confidence that God is responsible for every word in the Bible, and that all other Bibles and all other religions are the direct work of the devil. Probably prays for people who don't believe that way. He is perfectly honest in it. That is simply his size, and he usually pities anybody who wears a larger hat.

CHIEFLY WOMEN.

But they say this is not a matter of reason. This is outside of reason, it is all a matter of faith. But whenever a superstition claims to be so holy that you must not use your reason about it, there is some-