

WOMEN IN DEMOCRACY

IN the end the burden of the world falls upon the woman. Civilization has been created to protect her. When the system fails she is the first to suffer,—to suffer in her estate, her person, and, worse still, in her own nature. In all revolutions the record of this sudden degradation is the darkest page.

Civilization is merely a series of conventions built up by men; but they, and women too, have an incurable propensity for destroying the fabric by enquiring into the reason and the truth of them. In the best institutions there are evils which excite a bitter indignation when the mind is fixed upon the evil alone; in all things there is an element of absurdity and matter for laughter. When this tide of criticism—for laughter is the most subtle of all criticism—rises to a mad chorus the conventions fail, and humanity is compelled with infinite patience to build them up again. Reason and truth having done their worst, hope revives once more.

Women in democracy will begin the new life without the shelter of the convention, exposed to the fierce glare of material truth, devoid of those illusions which the human heart creates for its own comfort. Indeed, woman herself is a convention, a figment created in the mind of man, anthropomorphic as God is. Democracy is the raw fact and truth of life; all civilization is an attempt to shield us from it.

At a time in the history of the race so early that there were only two persons, a man and a woman in the world, and two personages, this question of truth arose. An injunction was laid upon the man, accompanied by the threat, that if he broke the convention, he would surely die that very day. The minor personage questioned the convention and denied the validity of the threat. Acting under this suggestion the man and the woman assumed the risk. The chief character