

her graces, the naive charms of her wit, the droll railleries at my escapades, the merry logic she could use to convince me of my follies, would be a story long in the telling. Her gifts were as numerous as her substance was intangible.

Once I went to dine with a group of bachelors like myself, and at the third course—there were eight of them and something after—the talk drifted to the subject which stands at the head of my present writing. None of our bachelors were old in years, but some of them were aged and confirmed in the mysteries of their order. Bachelors they had always been, and bachelors they would remain till the crack of doom. One worthy stood up in his place and offered a toast to the confusion of anyone in the company who would forswear his present allegiance. Women, he shouted, were tolerable companions for an evening beneath the gas-lights or on the piazza at a summer watering-place, but to sit across the table from the same woman for a life-time was a bondage not to be endured. He had never yet met a woman whom he could trust; they were all schemers and triflers and for his part he would have none of them.

Others followed in the same vein, mocking and making light of women from Eve to Cleopatra, from Cleopatra to their latest acquaintance of the drawing-room. Some said women were ignorant, some averred that they were only useful as ornaments or play-things and could offer a man no lasting companionship; one or two distrusted them entirely. The turn of Sandys came at last, though, indeed, that name is a later acquisition, and as I rose in my place to speak, the woman of my fancy was before me with eyes on fire

and indignation in her posture. I think she must have seized the words as they issued from my lips and flung them in hot anger among my wincing comrades. I called them cowards and weaklings that they should talk thus of the women who bore them. It was their own false features which they saw reflected in the faces before which they offered their hollow flattery, it was their own ignorance and inconstancy which they imputed to woman-kind, their own vulgarity which saw nothing in women but perishable ornaments and toys. In my flood of talk the mistress of my fancy was still before me, supporting my arguments and convincing me more deeply of the truth of them. In woman, I went on, a man can find all that he looks for, and if his own instincts are high he will find some heart to respond to them and to further all the best efforts he can make. Just as human life itself is not something hemmed in and confined in narrow limits, so the association of one man with one woman from youth to age, is a redoubled protest against the limitations of time and space. In it all the faculties of manhood are enlarged and made more noble; the mind is stimulated to fresh efforts, and the heart opens a wider door to the cry of sufferers in whatever degree and place they suffer.

But just as my mentor in the thin air before me had beckoned me to her defence, so she waved me down before I had gone too far, and I took my place again behind the wine glasses amid the bravos of the company. I had made some impression at least, for the theme was changed forthwith and no more ribaldry passed among them concerning the women of our acquaintance. Whenever such an oc-