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**A View Of Society In Europe, In Its Progress From
Rudeness To Refinement: Or, Inquiries Concerning The
History Of Law, Government, And Manners**

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Edinburgh, 1778

Section II. An Idea of the German Women.

urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-1563

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An Idea of the German Women.

IT has been asserted, that men, in savage and barbarous periods, are carried to the sex merely from the incitement of animal gratification, and that they feel not the power of beauty, nor the pleasures which arise from love; and a multitude of facts have been produced from history to confirm this theory. It is concluded, of consequence, that, in such times, women are in an abject state of servility, from which they advance not till the ages of property (1).

One would fancy it, notwithstanding, consistent with reason, to imagine, that the sexes, in every period of society, are important to each other; and that the member of a rude community, as well as the polished citizen, is susceptible of tenderness and sentiment. He is a stranger, indeed, to the metaphysic of love, and to the fopperies of gallantry; but his heart cannot be insensible to female attractions. He cannot but be drawn by
 beauty;



beauty; he must know a preference in the objects of his affection; and he must feel and experience, in a certain degree, at least, that bewitching intercourse, and those delightful agitations, which constitute the greatest charm of cultivated life.

This opinion, I conceive, is strongly confirmed by the history of the Germanic states. Their general character, with particular and obvious facts, illustrate the importance and the consideration in which they held their women.

Even in the age of Caesar, the German tribes had conceived and acknowledged the idea and existence of a public interest, and, in general, had submitted to a mode of government in which the chiefs and the people had their departments as well as the prince. They are described in a similar, but a more cultivated situation, by Tacitus; and the spirit of liberty and independence which animated their actions, was to produce that limited and legal administration which still gives distinction and dignity to the kingdoms of Europe. Among such nations, accordingly, the women were necessarily free, and sensible only of the restraints which arise from manners.

The state of society, which precedes the knowledge of an extensive property and the meannesses which flow from refinement and commerce, is in a high degree propitious to women. To treat them with cruelty does not consist with the elevation of sen-

timent



timent which then prevails. Among the people, of whom I speak, even the slave was exposed to no studied insult or oppression (2). Of the women, the warrior and the citizen considered himself as the friend and the protector; and their weakness only served to render the attachment to them the more lasting and tender.

While courage and strength and feats of prowess gave glory to the men, the women were judged of by a different standard. They were studious to recommend themselves by the performance of domestic duties. They attended to the cares of the family and the house; and the mother found a long and a serious occupation in the rearing of her children, who were not allowed to approach the father in public till a certain age (3). To her daughters she endeavoured to give the accomplishments which might win to them the chiefs who were most celebrated and powerful. To her sons she recited the exploits of their ancestors, and formed them to valour.

Nor are these the only sources of the respect which was paid to them. It has been often remarked, that, in every period of society, the women are more disposed to rapture and devotion than the men, and that their curiosity to pry into futurity is more extravagant. The superstitious weaknesses, however, of the sex, which, in refined times, are a subject of ridicule, lead to reverence and attention in a rude age. The Germanic armies seldom took
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the field without forcereffes; and these had an important share in directing their operations (4). In private and civil affairs, their authority was not less decisive. On the foundation of the wonder and astonishment excited by the knowledge arrogated by the women, by the skill they displayed in divination, and, above all, by the ceremony and the cruelty of the rites they practised, a solid and permanent influence was established (5). It was thought, that they had something divine in their nature; and the names of many of them, who were worshipped as divinities, have come down in history (6).

To attend to the qualities of plants, and to the curing of wounds, was another branch of their occupation (7); and, in times of war and depredation, it is difficult to conceive a circumstance which could recommend them more. Nor were they inattentive to adorn their persons. The linen, which made the principal article of their dress, was of their own manufacture; and they had a pride in intermixing it with purple (8). They went frequently into the bath; their hair flowed in ringlets; a part of their charms was industriously displayed; and, in evidence of their beauty, there may be brought the testimony of the historian, and the song of the poet (9).

In the more serious and important wars in which these nations engaged, the chiefs and warriors seem constantly to have carried their wives and female relations along with them as an incitement to their valour. These objects of their affection they

placed



placed at a small distance from the field of battle: And the most terrible calamity which could befall them, was their captivity. By their importunity and wailing, it is recorded, that armies, in the moment of submission, have been recovered; and the stipulations of states were never so certainly secured as when some virgins of rank were delivered among the hostages (10). In the blood of their women, it was conceived there was a charm and a virtue; and hence it proceeded, that, to their uncles by the *mother* and to their fathers, children were the objects of an *equal* affection and tenderness (11).

But, what evinces their consideration beyond the possibility of a doubt, is the attention they bestowed on business and affairs. They felt, as well as the noble and the warrior, the cares of the community. They watched over its interest, considered its connection with other states, and thought of improving its policy, and extending its dominion. They went to the public councils or assemblies of their nations, heard the debates of the statesmen, and were called upon to deliver their sentiments. And, what is worthy of particular notice, this consequence in active scenes they transmitted to their posterity (12).

Such, in general, was the condition of women among our ancestors, while they were yet in their woods; and such, I should think, is in a great measure their state in every country of the globe in an age of society and manners, which knows not the cares, the corruptions, and the distinctions of property (13).

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