

## CONCERNING THE VIRTUES OF WOMEN.

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CONCERNING the virtues of women, O Clea, I am not of the same mind with Thucydides. For he would prove that she is the best woman concerning whom there is the least discourse made by people abroad, either to her praise or dispraise ; judging that, as the person, so the very name of a good woman ought to be retired and not gad abroad. But to us Gorgias seems more accurate, who requires that not only the face but the fame of a woman should be known to many. For the Roman law seems exceeding good, which permits due praises to be given publicly both to men and women after death. Wherefore when Leontis, a most excellent woman, departed this life, immediately we made a long oration to thee about her, and truly not devoid of philosophical consolation ; and now (as thou didst desire) I send thee in writing the rest of my speech and conversation, carrying with it an historical demonstration that the virtue of a man and woman is one and the same. And although it be not composed for the tickling of the ear, yet if there be jucundity in the nature of an example to him that is persuaded of the truth of it, my narration fails not of that grace which works conviction ; neither is it ashamed of commixing the Graces with the Muses in the sweetest harmony (as Euripides saith), while it engageth confidence especially through that part of the soul which is studious of grace and beauty. For surely, if, whilst we asserted the art of painting to be the same, whether per-

formed by men or women, we produced the same sort of draughts wrought by women which Apelles, Zeuxis, or Nicomachus hath left, is there any one who would reprehend us as attempting rather to humor and cajole men than to convince them? Verily I do not think it. Moreover, if, whilst we go to make appear that the poetic or comic art is not one thing in men and another in women, we compare Sappho's verses with Anacreon's, or the Sibylline oracles with those of Bacis, can any one justly blame this way of argumentation, because it insinuates a credence into the pleased and delighted hearers? No one surely would say this. Neither can a man truly any way better learn the resemblance and the difference between feminine and virile virtue than by comparing together lives with lives, exploits with exploits, as the products of some great art; duly considering whether the magnanimity of Semiramis carries with it the same character and impression with that of Sesostris, or the cunning of Tanaquil the same with that of King Servius, or the discretion of Porcia the same with that of Brutus, or that of Pelopidas with Timoclea, — regarding that quality of these virtues wherein lie their chiefest point and force. Moreover, virtues do admit some other differences, like peculiar colors, by reason of men's dispositions, and are assimilated to the manners and temperaments of the bodies wherein they are, yea, to the education and manner of diet. Achilles was courageous in one manner, Ajax in another; the subtlety of Ulysses was not like that of Nestor, neither were Cato and Agesilaus just after the same manner; neither was Eirene a lover of her husband as Alcestis was; neither was Cornelia magnanimous in the same way with Olympias. But, for all this, we do not say that there are many kinds of fortitude, prudence, and justice specifically distinct, so long as their individual dissimilitudes exclude none of them from the specific definitions.

Those things now which are very commonly discoursed of, and of which I know thou hast had the exact history and knowledge from solid books, I will at present omit, unless there be some public and recorded matters worth your hearing, which have escaped the historians of former times.

And seeing that many worthy things, both public and private, have been done by women, it is not amiss to give a brief historical account of those that are public, in the first place.

EXAMPLE 1. *Of the Trojan Women.*

Of those that escaped at the taking of Troy the most part were exercised with much tempestuous weather, and being inexperienced in navigation and unacquainted with the sea, they were wafted over into Italy; and about the river Tiber they made a very narrow escape by putting into such ports and havens as they could meet with. Whilst the men went about the country to enquire after pilots, there fell out a discourse among the women, that for a people as fortunate and happy as they had been, any fixed habitation on the land was better than perpetual wandering over the sea; and that they must make a new country for themselves, seeing it was impossible to recover that which they had lost. Upon this, complotting together, they set fire on the ships, Roma (as they say) being one of the first in the attempt. But having done these things, they went to meet their husbands, who were running towards the sea to the relief of the ships; and fearing their indignation, they laid hold some of them on their husbands, and some on their kinsfolk, and fell a kissing them soundly; by which carriage they obtained their charitable reception. Wherefore it hath been formerly, and now remains to be a custom among the Romans, for the women to salute their kinsfolk that come unto them by kissing.

The Trojans as it seems, being sensible of the strait they were in, and having also made some experience of the natives entertaining them with much bounty and humanity, applauded the exploit of the women, and sat down by the Latins.

EXAMPLE 2. *Of the Phocian Women.*

The action of the women of Phocis hath not fallen under the cognizance of any noted writer of that age, and yet there was never a more memorable deed of virtue wrought by women,—the which is attested by those famous sacred rites performed by the Phocians at Hyampolis, and by ancient decrees. The total history of the transaction is particularly recorded in the Life of Daiphantus.

The story of those women is this. There was an implacable war between the Thessalians and the Phocians. For these (the Phocians) slew all the Thessalian governors and magistrates in the cities of Phocis in one day. Whereupon they (the Thessalians) slew two hundred and fifty Phocian hostages, and with their whole host marched up against them through Locris, publishing their resolution to spare no men that were of age, and to sell the women and children for slaves. Daiphantus therefore, the son of Bathyllius, a triumvir, governor of Phocis, persuaded the Phocian men themselves to go to meet the Thessalians in battle; but as for the women, together with their children, that they should assemble them from all the parts of Phocis into one place, which they should pile round with combustible matter, and should leave a watch, to whom they should give in charge, that if he perceived that the men were conquered, he should immediately set fire to the pile and burn all the bodies to ashes. The counsels were agreed to by some, but one stands up and saith: It is just that these things be consented to by the women also, and

if they do not cheerfully submit to it, they should have no force offered to them. The account of this discourse being come to the women, they assembled together by themselves, and carried it by vote, and applauded Daiphantus as a man that best consulted the affairs of Phocis; they say also, that the children meeting together privately voted the same things. These matters being thus settled, the Phocians joining battle at Cleonae, a town of Hyampolis, got the victory. Hence the Grecians call this vote of the Phocian women *Aponoia* (the desperate resolve). And of all the festivals this of the *Elaphebolia* is the greatest, which they observe to Diana in Hyampolis to this day, in remembrance of this victory.

EXAMPLE 3. *Of the Women of Chios.*

The people of Chios possessed themselves of *Leuconia* upon this occasion following. A certain famous man of the nobles of Chios was married; whilst the bride was drawn in her chariot, King *Hippoclus*, an intimate friend of the bridegroom's, being present with the rest, and also fuddled and merry, leaped into the chariot, not designing any incivility, but only to keep up the usual custom and to make sport. However, the bridegroom's friends slew him. The effects of divine displeasure appearing against the people of Chios, and the oracle commanding them to slay the slayers of *Hippoclus*, they replied, We have all of us slain *Hippoclus*. The oracle commanded them all therefore to depart the city, if all did partake of the guilt. So that at length the principals, accessories, and abettors of the murder by any means whatsoever, being not a few in number nor feeble for strength, transplanted themselves into *Leuconia*, which the Chians had once taken from the *Coronians* by the aid of the *Erythraeans*. Afterward a war arising between them and the *Erythraeans*, by far the most potent

people among the Ionians, when the latter invaded Leuconia, the men of Chios were not able to defend themselves, and came to an agreement to depart upon these terms, that every one should take with him only one cloak and one coat, and nothing else. But the women of Chios upbraided them as mean-spirited men, that they would lay down their weapons and go naked men through their enemies. And when they made answer that they were sworn so to do, they charged them not to leave their weapons behind them, but to say to their adversaries, that the spear is a cloak and the buckler a coat to every man of courage. The men of Chios being persuaded to these things, and emboldening themselves courageously against the Erythraeans, and showing their weapons, the Erythraeans were amazed at their audacity, and none opposed or hindered them, but were glad of their departure. These men therefore, being taught courage by the women in this manner, made a safe escape.

Many years after this there was another exploit, nothing inferior to this in fortitude, performed by the women of Chios. When Philip, the son of Demetrius, besieged the city, he set forth a barbarous and insolent proclamation, inviting the servants to a defection upon promise of liberty and marriage of their mistresses, saying that he would give them their masters' wives into their possession. At this the women were dreadfully and outrageously incensed; and also the servants were no less provoked to indignation, and were ready to assist. Therefore they rushed forth furiously and ascended the wall, bringing stones and darts, encouraging and animating the soldiers; so that in the end these women discomfited and repulsed the enemy, and caused Philip to raise his siege, while not so much as one servant fell off to him.

EXAMPLE 4. *Of the Argive Women.*

Of all the renowned actions performed by women, none was more famous than the fight with Cleomenes in the country of Argos, whom Telesilla the poetess by her influence defeated. This woman they say was of an honorable family, but had a sickly body; she therefore sent to consult the oracle concerning her health. Answer was made, that she must be a servant to the Muses. Accordingly she becomes obedient to the Goddess, applying herself to poetry and music; her distempers left her, and she became the mirror of women in the art of poetry. Now when Cleomenes, king of the Spartans, having slain many Argives (but not so many as some fabulously reported, to wit, 7,777), marched up against the city, the youthful women were (as it were) divinely inspired with desperate resolution and courage to repulse the enemies out of their native country.

They take arms under the conduct of Telesilla, they place themselves upon the battlements, they crown the walls, even to the admiration of the enemy; they by a sally beat off Cleomenes, with the slaughter of many of his men; and as for the other king, Demaratus (as Socrates saith), he having entered the city and possessed him of the so-called Pamphyliacum, they beat him out. In this manner the city being preserved, those women that were slain in the engagement they buried by the Argive road; to them that escaped they gave the honor of erecting the statue of Mars, in perpetual memorial of their bravery. Some say this fight was on the seventh day of the month; others say it was on the first day of the month, which is now called the fourth and was anciently called Hermaeus by the Argives; upon which day, even to this time, they perform their Hybristica (i.e., their sacred rites of incivility), clothing the women with men's coats and cloaks, but the men with women's veils and petticoats. To repair the scarcity

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