

WOMAN

VOLUME II

In All Ages and in All Countries

ROMAN WOMEN

by

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[Illustration 1:  
TULLIA, DAUGHTER OF SERVIUS  
\_After the painting by E. Hildebrand\_

\_We have had the good queen, now we encounter the  
bad..... Tullia was of that type of which Shakespeare  
has given a picture in Lady Macbeth.....

Lucius, her husband, with an armed band, repaired to  
the

Senate and seated himself on the throne. King Servius  
appeared, but no one thought it worth while to hinder  
Lucius from throwing the aged ruler down the steps of  
the Senate house; which he manfully did.

Tullia was the instigator of this\_ coup d'état; \_and  
impatient to learn its success, drove to the Forum, and,  
calling her husband from the Senate chamber, was the

first to hail him as king. But Lucius commanded her to return home; and the tradition runs that as she was going thither her chariot wheels passed over the dead body of her royal father.\_]

## PREFACE

The student of history does not proceed far in his researches before he discovers that human nature is a fixed quality. Other lands, other manners; other times, other customs. But the man behind the manner is essentially the same; the woman under the changed custom is not thereby rendered essentially different, any more than she is by a varying of costume. The women of ancient Rome exemplified the same virtues, and were impelled by the same foibles as are the women of to-day. And the difference in environment, the vanished conditions of Roman life, gain large scientific interest from the fact that they did not result in any dissimilarity of fundamental character. If, by the most violent exercise of the imagination, it were possible to transport a female infant of the twentieth century, and cause her to be reared among the women of the Augustan age, she would fit as naturally into her surroundings as she would into the present society of London or of New York. Her legal status would be different; her moral conceptions would be unlike those of the present age; her duties, pleasures, privileges, and limitations would combine to make the accidents of life very different. But underneath all this, the same humanity, the same

femininity, the same habits of mind are revealed. Herein is the chief use of history--above that of gratifying natural curiosity--the ascertaining how human nature will comport itself under varying conditions. The author hopes that the following pages, wherein the Roman woman is taken as an illustration, will be found of use to the student of the science of humanity, and not uninteresting to the reader inquisitive as to the manner of the ancient civilization.

ALFRED BRITAIN.

I

#### THE WOMAN OF LEGENDARY ROME

The conditions which governed the life of woman in the earliest days of Roman history are too far removed from the searchlight of historical investigation for us to essay to indicate them with any degree of fulness and accuracy of detail. While it is true that the ancient writers have bequeathed to us records of historic events from the very founding of their nation, the source of their information is very questionable and its authenticity extremely doubtful. Rome did not cultivate literature until very late in her history; she was too greatly preoccupied in her rôle of conquering the world. At a time when every Greek was acquainted with the noblest poetry produced by his gifted

race, Rome had not produced a single writer whose name has been preserved. And if at that time she had possessed any men of letters, it is quite certain that there were few of her citizens who would have been able to read their works. Hence, when the first attempt was made to write her history, the authors depended principally for their material on traditions and legends which, as is the case with all such lore, had gained greatly in marvellousness at the expense of historical value. In addition to these sources, it is probable that during the early centuries annals were kept of the principal happenings in the State. According to Cicero, they were written at the end of each year by the high priest. These records were used by the first historians; and it is likely that the latter were not so greatly restrained, by their literary conscience, from enlarging on the material, as they were tempted, according to the power of their imagination, to present a picture both interesting and satisfactory to the national pride. In many cases, as where the exact words of their characters are reported, the ancient historians evidently deemed that any deficiencies in the matter of proof were abundantly atoned for by the explicitness of the information given.

As to the historical value of legends, that is a question upon which modern writers are inclined to disagree. Since the inauguration of the higher criticism, it has been the fashion for extremists entirely to disown any belief in the dramatis personæ of ancient traditions. They

claim that the names and the actions thus celebrated usually represent natural forces and historic evolutions; though, to the ordinary student, this would seem to require a remarkable amount of poetic inventiveness on the part of an undeveloped people. Moreover, it is not, perhaps, without reason that the student often looks upon the manner in which modern scholars reject the traditional contributions of the old historians as being a little arbitrary. What traveller has not found his patience sorely tried, while viewing with reverence the reputed site of some heroic or sacred occurrence of far-off days, as he recalled to memory the fact that the latest authorities hold that, while the thing might have taken place a few miles to the east or a short distance to the north, it, for certain erudite but unconvincing reasons, could not possibly have occurred on the spot where it has been located by the continuous belief of centuries?

The story of Rome from its founding to the end of the regal period, as it is told in the ancient classics, is no longer accepted as history. It is, for the most part, classified with those mythical creations with which an uncultured people endeavor to account for the origin and the evolution and revolutions of their race. Yet, passing over the marvellous and the manifestly impossible, why may we not at least claim the right to believe the compilers of these ancient legends, when they tell us of certain names that were great in the beginning of their nation? Modern criticism may be right in asserting that

it is not likely  
that the city on the Tiber was called Roma because a man  
named Romulus  
selected an uninhabited site and built upon it. Yet why  
may we not be  
allowed to believe that in those early times there was  
one hero so  
strong and masterful that he came to be known as  
preëminently the "Man  
of Rome"? The character may have been a real one, even  
though the city  
gave him his name, instead of the reverse, as later  
generations  
surmised. And inasmuch as there is an Alexandria, not to  
speak of  
innumerable modern "villes" with well-known surnames for  
prefixes, it  
need not be thought a thing entirely incredible that the  
ancient city  
was really called after the man who established its  
importance.

It is the habit of modern historians to look with  
suspicion upon stories  
such as those which form our sole material for any  
personal illustration  
in this present chapter, because they are of a kind so  
generally found  
in the legends of all nations. But may not the  
multiplication of these  
long-lived narratives, instead of disproving the  
intrinsic truth of any  
given one, simply serve to illustrate the fact that,  
human nature being  
a permanent factor, the doings of men under similar  
circumstances, in  
any age or locality, will be marked by a uniformity of  
character? For  
our present purpose, however, if in such twilight as is  
given by  
long-preserved monuments and ancient relics, we choose  
to fancy that we  
perceive, moving about in their daily life, the feminine  
forms of  
traditional lore, the combination will only serve to

form a more human,  
and really not less accurate, picture.

The limits of our subject do not require that we should go back so far as the epoch of Æneas, the hero of Troy; nor need we take into consideration the part which he and Lavinia, his wife, may have played upon the Latin shores. Their traditional coming to Italy simply serves to indicate the fact that nearly all the tribes which inhabited the country at the commencement of Roman history were of the same branch of the great Aryan race as the Greeks. The Romans were the brothers of the Greeks. The former were of that same lithe, supple-bodied, straight-featured type which the wonderful art of the latter has enthroned, for all the ages, as the noblest realization of ideal physical beauty.

But when we consider the rude conditions under which life was passed, it is probable that the highest examples of feminine grace would, in many respects, be open to severe criticism from the civilized and artificial taste which has prevailed in after ages. Those were the days of Arcadian simplicity, which poetry has peopled with sweet and enticing Phyllises and Chloes, whose only occupation was to listen to the pipings of languishing shepherds. But, in reality, though life was simple and wants were few, the women, as in all semi-civilized communities, gave an overplus of labor in return for the special exertions of the men in the chase and the combat. Hence, though the poetic conception may be

alluring, we are compelled to believe that the reality possessed but few advantages that could arouse the envy of a modern village maiden. The woman of earliest Rome was wholly a product of nature, endowed only with the unfailing charms of femininity, which were solely reinforced with the perfect health and vigor which come from a simple life.

Of such a type we may imagine Rhea Sylvia, the legendary mother of Romulus and Remus. She was the daughter of a king, but one who was not a monarch in the later significance of the title. Of kings there were many in the Latium of those days. The title meant merely the patriarch of a clan, or the head man of a small city. The regal abode was probably a small, round structure, built of wood and roofed with straw. It may have consisted of only one room, with a hole in the ceiling to admit light and allow the smoke to escape. Of furniture there was little more than rude tables and grass or leaf covered couches, together with the Lares, or household gods. But though life conditioned by such meagre accessories was simple, it was by no means idle, and there existed no such contempt for labor and handicraft among the Latin tribesmen as grew up in later times. The king himself followed the plow, while his wife and daughters were busy with the distaff and spindle, the hand loom and the needle. It was the duty of the women to spin the wool and to make all the clothing for the household. Education consisted solely of the training in the requirements of this simple life, and was provided by no



school other than the daily experience which the boys  
and girls gathered  
among their elders. The art of writing was in the  
earliest days not  
entirely unknown, though, during long years of slow  
development, it was  
employed only in painting public records on leaves and  
skins; or, if  
greater permanence was required, the records were  
scratched upon tablets  
of wood. The amusements of the people consisted mainly  
of the festivals  
and athletic games which were held in honor of the gods.  
If it might  
only be believed that this life was as pleasant as it is  
pictured by  
Virgil, it would be easy to sympathize with the poet  
when he declares  
that he pined for such an existence himself. "The  
husbandman cleaves the  
earth with the crooked plow.... Winter comes: the  
Sicyonian berry is  
pounded in the oil presses; and the autumn lays down its  
various  
productions.... Meanwhile, the sweet babes twine around  
their parents'  
necks; his chaste family maintain their purity. The  
swain himself  
celebrates festal days; and extended on the grass, where  
a fire is in  
the middle, and where his companions crown the bowl,  
invokes thee, O  
Lanæus, making libation. On an elm is set forth to the  
masters of the  
flock prizes to be contended for with the winged  
javelin; and they strip  
their rustic bodies for the friendly struggle."  
Elsewhere the poet  
describes a home scene, where the man is working by the  
light of the  
winter fire: "Meanwhile, his spouse, cheering by song  
her tedious labor,  
runs over the webs with the shrill shuttle; or over the  
fire boils down  
the liquor of the luscious must, and skims with leaves

the tide of the  
trembling cauldron. This life of old the ancient Sabines  
followed; this,  
Remus and his brother strictly observed; thus Etruria  
grew in strength;  
and thus too did Rome become the glory and beauty of the  
world."

Unlike their sisters of Greece, the women of Rome were  
never secluded;  
yet their duties and responsibilities were strictly  
confined to domestic  
bounds. Here, however, while the husband was master, the  
wife was  
mistress. She took equal part with him in the worship of  
the family  
Lares, which worship was a prominent feature in every  
Roman household;  
and if he were a priest, she, by her marriage to him,  
became a  
priestess. But, except in certain religious  
institutions, she had not  
the slightest active connection with State or public  
affairs. That is,  
she had no such connection in theory and according to  
law; but it was in  
Rome as it has been in all ages and in all countries:  
there were no laws  
or customs that could prevent a woman who possessed  
gifts of mind and  
cherished ambitious projects from gaining some tool by  
means of whom her  
hand might turn the affairs of State to her will.

To this strenuous class of women, however, Rhea Sylvia  
did not belong.  
Her euphonious name has been preserved, not because of  
any active  
influence which she wielded over the destinies of men,  
but because,  
through the simple function of motherhood, she  
introduced into the  
history of the world a strong man. She was the daughter  
of Numitor, to  
whom his father had bequeathed the kingdom of the

Sylvian clan. But Amulius, another son, had driven his brother into exile, and, in order to secure himself in his usurpation, had put all his nephews to death. Rhea was spared, probably on account of the fact that the law did not allow women to reign, and hence her existence held no threat. Nevertheless, since of the women of princely houses are born possible claimants to thrones. Amulius deemed it best that some preventive measure should be taken. He evidently did not wish to commit unnecessary barbarities; and he also liked, if possible, to cover his self-protective actions with a gloss of seeming generosity. Rhea Sylvia should be the priestess of Vesta. Hers should be the honorable duty of guarding the perpetual fire which burned on the sacred hearth of the city. Thus she, as was befitting the daughter of Numitor, would be held in as high regard among the people as the queen herself. Incidentally, this would also preclude the possibility of any grandson appearing to claim the throne of the exiled Numitor; for the Vestals were most rigidly pledged to a life of constant virginity. But how often have the gods, and sometimes even Nature herself, thwarted the most cunningly devised schemes of men! Upon this truism Amulius must have reflected, when, without any previous declaration of her intention, Rhea Sylvia introduced to the community a sturdy pair of twins. She declared that Mars was the father of her offspring; either, as Livy discreetly remarks, because she believed it to be so, or because a god seemed the

most creditable author of her offence. In those times, the possibility and the frequent occurrence of such matches were devoutly believed, and the first historians freely availed themselves of this belief to enhance the glory of their race, or of a powerful family, by establishing for it the reputation of a divine origin. The idea of superhuman parentage was also a convenient means by which to account for, and sometimes excuse, the unusual character and extraordinary deeds of ancient heroes. In those days, when men's faith was simple and uncritical, belief in divine incarnation presented no serious difficulty.

It is evident, however, that Amulius was not greatly impressed with a sense of the sacredness of the children of the warrior-god. He threw the mother into prison, and ordered her sons to be drowned in the Tiber. But, as is usually and fortunately the case in legendary history, this order was intrusted to one who was either too pitiful or too careless to give it thorough execution. The infants, in their cradle or upon a rude raft, were set afloat on the river, which was at that time in flood; the waters, however, quickly subsided, and the boys were left alive on dry ground. Their cries attracted a shepherd named Faustulus, and by him they were carried to his home, where they were reared by his wife Laurentia. This woman is given a bad name by the ancients. They say that she was also called Lupa; and Lupa being the name applied to a woman of unchaste character, as well as the term used to designate a she-wolf, in this manner the sceptics accounted for the

marvellous story  
of the sons of Rhea being suckled by a wolf. But  
whatever may have been  
the failings of Laurentia, if there be any truth  
whatever in the legend,  
she made atonement by preserving the life of the founder  
of Rome. We  
will not follow these traditions in their well-known  
details. Whether or  
not Romulus was indeed the first to select the site of  
the city which  
was to spread over seven hills by the Tiber and from  
them dominate the  
world is as impossible to determine as it would be  
unimportant to our  
subject if ascertained. The purpose before us is solely  
to inquire what  
part and lot woman had in the founding of the infant  
State. That her  
rôle was mainly a passive one may be taken for granted,  
as being in  
accordance with the status of the weaker sex in the  
childhood of every  
race and nation.

The ancient historians, who accepted the Romulus legend  
without  
question, portray for us the growing town, so sturdily  
and rapidly  
advancing in power and fame as to excite the wonder and  
the jealousy of  
neighboring communities. One cause to which is  
attributed this  
prosperity is interesting, since it led to a famous  
episode in which  
women played a leading though an unwilling part. We are  
told that  
Romulus opened within, the bounds of the city an asylum,  
or place of  
refuge, where fugitives from justice or from servitude  
were received  
under the protection of the gods. This attracted new  
citizens in great  
numbers, but such as contributed nothing to the  
respectability of the

new State. The new-comers were, almost entirely, unmarried men; and soon the paucity of women in Rome gave cause for grave concern. Romulus had appointed a number of the leading citizens, whom he named as Senators, to assist him in the government. But it was not in the power of these city fathers to aid him materially in securing a continued growth of the community, unless wives could be provided. Ambassadors were despatched to the neighboring States, requesting treaties of alliance, and especially begging the privilege of intermarriage. Owing, doubtless, to the questionable character of the newly acquired inhabitants of Rome, this was a favor which no city was disposed to grant. Everywhere the ambassadors were confronted with the suggestion that an asylum be opened for women also, for only by such a plan could suitable mates be obtained for the men of Rome. Another reason, however, why wives were hard to obtain was the fact that women were comparatively scarce throughout Latium. The custom of exposing female infants to death was prevalent there, as in many other ancient races, daughters being looked upon as a source of weakness and expense to a family, as sons were a gain and a strength. Wives, however, being a necessity, the fathers of boys often secured as brides for their sons girls as soon as they were born. This laid upon the parents of the latter the obligation to spare their lives and rear them. There is no evidence that the purchase of wives was ever a custom among the Romans. Indeed, the opposite was from time immemorial the practice; a dower went with the bride. Hence it is

easy to see why  
the Latin fathers were unwilling to bestow their  
daughters,--who were  
not likely to remain on their hands for lack of  
suitors,--and especially  
the dowers that went with them, upon the adventurous  
young men who had  
sought at Rome asylum from justice or vengeance.

But in those ages, and especially in such a matter as  
the winning of  
wives, diplomacy was a resource not wholly depended  
upon. Among the  
marriage ceremonies of later times, there was a custom  
of parting the  
hair of the Roman bride with a spear. In this we find a  
reminiscence of  
the period when marriage by capture was resorted to when  
there seemed  
urgent necessity. Thus Romulus determined that what  
could not be gained  
by fair means should be obtained by the best method  
which came to hand.  
At the festival of the god Consus, appropriately the  
deity who presided  
over hidden deliberations, the seizure of the Sabine  
maidens was planned  
and carried out; and thus the Romans took to themselves  
wives. How  
closely this well-known story corresponds with facts, of  
course, cannot  
be determined. Possibly many of its details are attempts  
of later ages  
to account for wedding customs, the origin of which had  
been forgotten.  
But it is very probable that marriage by capture was  
common in the  
embryonic civilization of early Rome. And there may have  
been one  
occasion when this rude method of wooing was adopted in  
so flagrant and  
wholesale a manner that it led to a war with the  
Sabines, by which the  
remembrance of the event was perpetuated in the  
traditions of the

people. Michelet, commenting on this story in his brilliant manner, says: "The progress of humanity is striking. Springing in India from mystical love, the ideal of woman assumes in Germany the features of savage virginity and gigantic force; in Greece, those of grace and stratagem, to arrive among the Romans at the highest pagan morality, to virgin and conjugal dignity. The Sabines only follow their ravishers on compulsion, but, become Roman matrons, they refuse to return to the paternal mansion, disarm their fathers and their husbands, and unite them in one city." Plutarch says that it was in order to obtain forgiveness that the Romans assured certain privileges to their wives. No labor other than spinning should be demanded of them; they should take the inside of the path; nothing indecent should be done or said in their presence; they should not be summoned before the criminal judges; and their children should wear the \_pretexta\_ and the \_bulla\_. Thus in the time of the Greek historian the barbarism of the old times was forgotten, and to the primitive constitution was attributed all the civilization which it required centuries to bring about.

As fair Helen brought woe to Troy, so the abduction of the Sabine maidens was followed by the bitter vengeance of their indignant masculine relatives. If we may believe the old historians, the women soon became reconciled to their enforced condition as wives of the Romans. Doubtless the writers drew this conclusion more from their knowledge of the yielding disposition of feminine nature



than from any precise acquaintance with the facts. It being totally uncustomary for the woman to be allowed any decision in the matter, it was a thing of small importance to her whether she was taken by her husband, without either her consent or that of her father, or whether she was given by her father to her husband, equally without being consulted.

The Sabines waited patiently for a favorable opportunity; and when it came, they attacked the Romans with good success. They even gained possession of the strongest fortifications of the city. But, according to the legend, they could not have won such advantage had it not been for the love of gaud of Tarpeia, the daughter of one of the captains of Romulus. Tatius, the King of the Sabines, induced her to open for him the gates, promising as a reward the golden bracelets which his soldiers wore upon their left arms. It is noticeable that the difficulties which must have surrounded an interview between the king and the maiden are discreetly ignored by the tradition. She agreed to open the gate, on the pretence of going forth to draw water for the sacrifice, and the Sabine men were thereupon to rush in. Everything took place as arranged, except that the misguided Tarpeia received much more than she had bargained for. Her request was for "that which they wore upon their left arms," not remembering the fact that upon that arm they also carried their shields. The soldiers, as they entered, either through haste, or because they hated treachery though willing to avail themselves

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