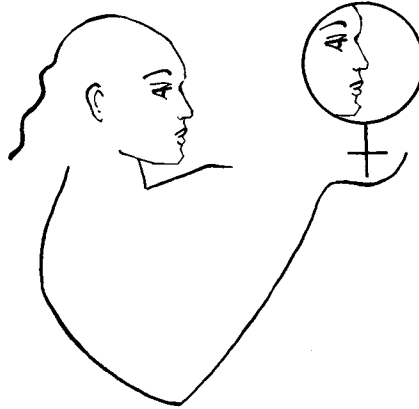


Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary's Note for Women

Submitted by Vic Murgaski



Equity demands that, having recorded this note in favour of husbands, we should also put before the public the case in favour of wives, presented to the junta of Portugal by a Countess of Arcira. This is the substance of it:

The Gospel has forbidden adultery for my husband just as for me; he will be damned as I shall, nothing is better established. When he committed 20 infidelities, when he gave my necklace to one of my rivals, and my ear-rings to another, I did not ask the judges to have him shaved, to shut him up among monks and to give me his property. And I, for having imitated him once, for having done with the most handsome young man in Lisbon what he did every day with impunity with the most idiotic strumpets of the court and the town, have to answer at the bar before licentiatees each of whom would be at my feet if we were alone together in my closet; have to endure at the court the usher cutting off my hair which is the most beautiful in the world; and being shut up among nuns who have no common sense, deprived of my dowry and my marriage covenants, with all my property given to my coxcomb of a husband to help him seduce other women and to commit fresh adulteries.

I ask if it is just, and if it is not evident that the laws were made my cuckolds?

In answer to my plea I am told that I should be happy not to be stoned at the city gate by the canons, the priests of the parish and the whole populace. This was the practice among the first nation of the earth, the chosen nation, the cherished nation, the only one which was right when all the others were wrong.

To these barbarities I reply that when the poor adulteress was presented by her accusers to the Master of the old and new law, He did not have her stoned; that on the contrary He reproached them with their injustice, that he laughed at them by writing on

the ground with his finger, that he quoted the old Hebraic proverb — 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her'; that then they all retired, the oldest fleeing first, because the older they were the more adulteries had they committed.

The doctors of canon law answer me that this history of the adulteress is related only in the Gospel of St. John, that it was not inserted there until later. Leontius, Maldonat, affirm that it is not to be found in a single ancient Greek copy; that none of the twenty-three early commentators mentions it. Origen, St. Jerome, St. John Chrysostom, Theophilact, Nonnus, do not recognize it all all. It is not to be found in the Syriac Bible, it is not in Ulphilas' version.

That is what my husband's advocates say, they who would have me not only shaved, but also stoned.

But the advocates who pleaded for me say that Ammonius, author of the third century, recognized this story as true, and that if St. Jerome rejects it in some places, he adopts it in others; that, in a word, it is authentic to-day. I leave there, and I say to my husband: "If you are without sin, shave me, imprison me, take my property; but if you have committed more sins than I have, it is for me to shave you, to have you imprisoned, and to seize your fortune. In justice these things should be equal."

My husband answers that he is my superior and my chief, that he is more than an inch taller, that he is shaggy as a bear; that consequently I owe him everything, and that he owes me nothing.

But I ask if Queen Anne of England is not her husband's chief? if her husband the Prince of Denmark, who is her High Admiral, does not owe her entire obedience? and if she would not have him condemned by the court of peers if the little man's infidelity were in question? It is therefore clear that if the women do not have the men punished, it is when they are not the stronger. ○