

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

WOMEN.

An interesting volume containing the papers on inter-racial problems communicated to the First Universal Races' Congress, held in London in July, and edited by Mr. G. Spiller, Hon. Organiser of the Congress, has just been published by Messrs. P. S. King & Son, Orchard House, Westminster. The introduction is contributed by Lord Weardale, who writes that "to those who regard the furtherance of International Goodwill and Peace as the highest of all human interests, the occasion of the First Universal Races' Congress opens a vista of almost boundless promise."

It is singular that at such a Congress, concerned with matters which affect women so closely, so few of the papers should have been read by women, and therefore that on "The Present Position of Women," by Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble), of Calcutta, is of special interest. In a paper of very high merit she contends that "in every social evolution, whether of the modern American, the Hottentot, the Semitic, or the Mongolian, the dynamic element lies in the ideal behind it. . . . Ideals are the opportunity of all, the property of none; and sanity of view seems to demand that we should never lose sight of the underlying unity and *humanness* of humanity."

Discussing the classification to be followed in dealing with the subject of her paper, Sister Nivedita discards that of Asiatic and European as inadequate, and the terms Eastern and Western as too vague, and modern and mediæval too inexact. She proceeds, "perhaps the only true classification is based on ideals, and, if so, we might divide human society, in so far as woman is concerned, into communities dominated by the civic, and communities dominated by the family ideal."

"Under the civic ideal—imperfectly as particular women may feel that this has yet been realised—both men and women tend to be recognised as individuals, holding definite relations to each other in the public economy, and by their own free will co-operating to build up the family. The *civitas* tends to ignore the family, save as a result, like any other form of productive co-operation, and in its fullest development may perhaps come to ignore sex. In America, for instance, both men and women are known as 'citizens.' No one asks 'Are you a *native* or a *subject* of American?' but always 'Are you an American citizen?' The contemporary struggle of the Englishwoman for the rudiments of political equality with men is but a single step in the long process of women's civic evolution. The arrival of this moment is undoubtedly hastened by the very marked tendency of modern nations towards the economic independence of women. . . . One

fact amongst the many thus brought into play is the impracticability of the family as their main career for some of the most vigorous and intelligent of women. These are thrown back upon the *civitas* for the theatre of their activities and the material of their mental and emotional development."

Regarding the civic evolution of woman as a process, Sister Nivedita says it is easy to see that it will always take place most rapidly in those communities, and at those epochs, when political or industrial transformation, or both, are most energetic and individuating. If the Anglo-Saxon race appears at the moment to lead the world we must not forget the brilliance of the part played by women in the national history of France, nor the mediæval Church, which, as a sort of *civitas* of the soul, offered an organized super-domestic career to women throughout the Middle Ages, and will probably play an immense part even in her future. Nor must we forget that Finland has outstripped even the English-speaking nations, nor overlook the womanhood of the East. "The importance of woman in the dynastic history of China, for example, during the last four thousand years, would, of itself, remind us that, though the family may dominate the life of the Chinese woman, yet she is not absolutely excluded from the civic career. Again, the noble protest of his inferior wife, Tchong-tse, to the Emperor in 556 B.C., against the nomination of her own son as heir to the throne, shows that moral development has been known in that country to go hand in hand with opportunity: 'Such a step,' she says, 'would indeed gratify my affection, but it would be contrary to the laws. Think and act as a prince, and not as a father.' This is an utterance which all will agree, for its civic virtue and sound political sense, to have been worthy of any matron of Imperial Rome."

The writer insists that while the evolution of her civic personality is at present the characteristic fact in the position of the Western woman, the East also has power, in virtue of her history and experience, to contribute to the working out of this ideal. To deny this would be as ignorantly unjust as to pretend that Western women had never achieved greatness by their fidelity, tenderness, and other virtues of the family.

Concerning the family ideal, the writer points out that "the society of the East, and, therefore necessarily its womanhood, has moulded itself from time immemorial on the central ideal of the family. . . . India, it should be understood, is the head-water of Asiatic thought and idealism. In other countries we may meet with applications, there we find the idea itself. In India the sanctity and sweetness of family life have been raised to the rank of a great culture. Wifehood is a religion, motherhood a dream of perfection; and the pride and protectiveness of man are developed to a very

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)