

CHAPTER 31 - The Modern ASPASIA

Chapter 31 of "The Ways of Men" entitled "The Modern Aspasia" gives a reflective and contrasting view of Paris compared to other historic European cities. It paints Paris as a unique entity that possesses an alluring charm capable of captivating a diverse audience ranging from the frivolous to the profoundly intellectual. Unlike the austere Bruges or Ghent, the sensual Naples, or the cultured Florence and Venice, Paris is depicted as a city that seduces all manner of people with its dynamic personality. From its ability to ensnare the hearts of art lovers and scholars with its historical and cultural depth, to its command over fashion that dictates the trends followed by women worldwide, Paris's influence is unparalleled.

The narrative describes Paris as engaging various types of individuals: those seeking pleasure, students aiming for high standards, dreamers fond of the past, and even those indifferent to the arts or study, all find themselves under Paris's spell. This enchantment is likened to a religious pilgrimage, with Paris catering to each visitor or resident's deepest yearnings, embodying not just a city but a living, breathing muse that inspires and demands tribute.

However, beneath the romantic imagery and adoration for the city's bewitching nature, there is a critical examination of Paris's fickleness and insincerity, particularly towards its international admirers. The chapter delves into the city's historical promiscuity in allegiances, shifting passions, and loyalties based on whim rather than principle, comparing it to the classical figure Aspasia. Paris is shown to be a city that drains its devotees of their vitality and wealth, only to discard them once they have served their purpose, encapsulating this nature with the phrase "AIME A BRISER SES IDOLES!"

A significant portion of the chapter also reflects on the disillusionment of Americans with Paris during a particular crisis that revealed the city's superficial affection towards its foreign lovers, favoring Spain over the U.S., despite the latter's longstanding enchantment and generosity towards the French capital. This reevaluation prompts a reassessment of the nature of Paris's allure and the depth of its commitment to those it ensnares, suggesting a complex love-hate relationship between the city and its global devotees.

Ultimately, the chapter conveys a layered portrait of Paris, acknowledging its unmatched beauty and cultural richness while also critiquing its capriciousness and the transient nature of its affections. It presents Paris as a city that embodies the heights of human artistic and cultural achievements, yet also cautions against the intoxication of its allure, warning of the potential for disillusionment and heartache amidst its ephemeral embrace.